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Hunolt's Sermons.

Vol. VI.

The Penitent Christian;

OR,

Sermons on the Virtue and Sacrament of Penance, and on everything required for Christian Repentance and Amendment of Life, and also on Doing Penance during the time of a Jubilee, and during Public Calamities.

IN SEVENTY-SIX SERMONS,

ADAPTED FOR ALL THE SUNDAYS AND MOST OF THE HOLY DAYS OF THE YEAR.
WITH A FULL INDEX OF ALL THE SERMONS, AN ALPHABETICAL INDEX
OF THE PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS TREATED, AND

COPIOUS MARGINAL NOTES.

BY THE

REV. FATHER FRANCIS HUNOLT,

Priest of the Society of Jesus, and Preacher in the Cathedral of Treves.

Translated from the Original German Edition of Cologne, 1740,

BY THE

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THIRTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON AN EASY AND LUXURIOUS LIFE.

Subject.

An easy and luxurious life is not the way to heaven, 1. because it is a sinful life, or one which is full of the danger of sin. 2. Because it is not a Christian life.—*Preached on the second Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Quid existis videre? hominem mollibus vestitum?—Matt. xi. 8.
“What went you out to see? a man clothed in soft garments?”

Introduction.

No, you must not expect to find My holy precursor a tenderling of the kind. You will see that he is clad in a rough camel-skin, a penitential garment, and that his body is emaciated by constant fasting, as he goes about preaching the necessity of penance. So might Our Lord have spoken to the people, and so it was in reality. But here, my dear brethren, I am constrained to ask, what sin had John committed? Was he not sanctified in his mother's womb? Was it not he whom Christ called an angel on account of his innocence? “For this is he of whom it is written: Behold, I send My angel before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee,” and who never in his whole life committed the least sin. Why, then, did he practise such severe penances? Alas, how he puts our weakness and delicacy to shame! For although we have often grievously sinned, as we must acknowledge, we treat ourselves so delicately and tenderly, that we shun the least discomfort, and gratify our senses on every occasion. But do we think that we can in that way gain heaven with St. John? No, Christians; that is not the way that leads thither. “From the days of John the Baptist until now,”

says Our Lord, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away;" and this is what I undertake to prove to-day, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

An easy and luxurious life is not the way to heaven. Why? Because it is either a sinful life, or one which is full of the danger of sin. This I shall show in the first part. Because it is not a Christian life; as I shall show in the second part, for the instruction of those who live in prosperity, that they may not forget Christian mortification and penance; for the consolation and encouragement of those who are tried by many crosses, that they may bear them with patience and resignation.

Both of these graces we expect from God with child-like confidence, trusting in the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

In what a
luxurious
life consists.

By those who lead a luxurious life I do not now understand the impure, who are addicted to the inordinate delights of the flesh; for we all know and readily acknowledge that such people have no claim to heaven. St. Paul has already rejected them: "Do not err: neither fornicators, nor adulterers. . . shall possess the kingdom of God."¹ And if there is a vice in the world that fills hell with souls, it is the abominable vice of impurity. Nor, on the other hand, do I wish now to condemn a reasonable care of the body, by which we concede to it at certain times its proper rest and comfort, food and drink, nay, now and then, too, the recreation and amusement that are suitable for it. All that is praiseworthy and sometimes necessary in order to preserve the health and strength of the body for the service of God. If the bow is bent too long, it will break, and if the body is too much fatigued, it will fall sick. By a luxurious life, then, I mean nothing but a constant seeking after bodily comforts and sensual gratifications; a perpetual flight and avoidance of all that can cause pain to the body, or displease the outward senses, or contradict the natural inclinations. In this way, everything that is delicious is given to the mouth, the eyes are allowed to look at all that is pleasing, the ears to hear what is delightful, the taste to enjoy what is sweet, the body, to feel what is soft and comforting; while, on the other hand, if any of those things is wanting, if the natural will or inclination is contradicted, then there

¹ Nolite errare: neque fornicarii, neque adulteri. . . regnum Dei possidebunt.—I. Cor. vi. 9, 10.

arises a feeling of vexation, annoyance, and discomfort, which makes one impatient, displeased, and discontented. This pampering of one's self is the cause, when possible, of an easy, luxurious life, in which a great part of one's time is spent in eating, drinking, sleeping, dressing, visiting, and amusements; in a word, one is always seeking for pleasures and distractions, although the latter may not in themselves be unlawful. This is the life against which St. Paul warned the Christians of Rome: "Make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences."¹ Mark the words, "in its concupiscences," as if he wished to say, you must not even have a desire for the delights of the flesh. O great Apostle, call out those words in the ears of all to-day! For what a vast number of men there are in the world now who thus make provision for the flesh! What a number there are who strive for such a life, and not merely those who have everything in abundance, but also they who are against their will in want of many things!

Now, I say that a luxurious life of this kind is not the way to heaven, and we must deal far more severely with our bodies, if we do not wish to wander from the right way, and to fall into the abyss of hell. And that, too, firstly, because such a life is either a sinful one, or, at all events, is exposed to the danger of sin. For otherwise the teaching of the holy Fathers of the Church does not deserve credit, and the Holy Scripture itself may be called in doubt. St. Paul, giving a short account of the vices most prevalent in the world, of which the wicked make, as it were, a chain of sin, lays down inordinate self-love as the first link of this chain, and the only cause of the manifold sins that spring from it. "Men shall be lovers of themselves," he writes to his disciple Timothy; there is the foundation, and what comes then? "Covetous, haughty, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, wicked, without affection, without peace, slanderers, incontinent, unmerciful, without kindness, traitors, stubborn, puffed up, and lovers of pleasures more than of God: having an appearance, indeed, of godliness, but denying the power thereof. . . . men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith, etc."² What a terrible catalogue of vices we

Such a life does not lead to heaven, for it is the occasion of many sins.

¹ Carnis curam ne feceritis in desideris.—Rom. xiii. 14.

² Erunt homines seipsos amantes cupidi, elati, superbi, blasphemæ, parentibus non obediētes, ingrati, scelesti, sine affectione, sine pace, crīminatores, incontinentes, immites, sine benignitate, proditores, protervi, tumidi, et voluptatum amatores magis quam Dei: habentes speciem quidem pietatis, virtutem autem ejus abnegantes. . . . homines corrupti mente, reprobi circa fidem.—II. Tim. iii. 2, 3, 4, 5, 8.

have there, all of which arise from inordinate self-love, that is, from the luxurious life of which we are speaking.

Nay, it is almost a constant state of sin.

But you may ask, is it, then, a sin to love one's self, to seek one's bodily comfort, and to gratify one's senses? And I am obliged to answer you, no, it is not a sin; but it is, generally speaking, a whole series of sins, nay, an almost constant state of sin. Every pleasure, considered in itself, may be lawful and becoming; but to seek and desire one pleasure after the other, and to be inordinately addicted to sensual delights, must be called a vicious life. "For the wisdom of the flesh is death," says St. Paul; and according to St. Thomas of Aquin those words mean, that "the wisdom of the flesh is a constant desire to gratify one's senses, and that is the death of the soul." "The wisdom of the flesh," continues St. Paul, "is an enemy to God: for it is not subject to the law of God: neither can it be. And they who are in the flesh, cannot please God." Can one be without sin while the soul is in such a dangerous condition? Can one love God and please Him, when one is His sworn enemy? What a bitter curse is uttered against voluptuaries in the Gospel of St. Luke! "Woe to you that are rich, for you have your consolation. . . Woe to you that are filled. . . Woe to you that now laugh,"² and have an easy life of it. Who speaks thus, my dear brethren? It is Jesus Christ Himself, Our Saviour, who is otherwise so good and gentle; and who can doubt what He says? Now, amongst all created things, there is nothing but sin alone, or the state of sin, which can be the object of the divine malediction and be execrated by Christ; so that an easy, luxurious life, in which one always seeks for comfort, satisfaction, pleasure, and delight, and which Christ threatens with such grievous woes, cannot be an innocent life, or one free from all sin; or else God condemns that which is not deserving of condemnation, nor in any way blameworthy, a supposition which is impossible.

Because one can hardly keep from sin without mortifying the senses.

And truly, when I consider the matter rightly, I am not surprised that the Word of God speaks so sharply against such a life. For if you reflect for a moment on its nature, qualities, and effects, you will see that it cannot but be vicious, or the occasion of many vices. If full liberty is given to eyes, ears, tongue, and the other senses; if they are not often restrained by self-

¹ Nam prudentia carnis mors est. Sapientia carnis inimica est Deo: legi enim Dei non est subjecta: nec enim potest. Qui autem in carne sunt, Deo placere non possunt.—Rom. viii. 6—8.

² Vae vobis divitibus, quia habetis consolationem vestram. . . vae vobis, qui saturati estis. . . vae vobis, qui ridetis nunc.—Luke vi. 24, 25.

denial, must they not frequently meet with objects that are unlawful and dangerous to the soul? What is, therefore, more necessary in this respect, than constant, daily mortification, of which those fastidious people do not wish to know anything? Besides, who does not know and experience what a powerful influence the corrupt inclinations and desires of the flesh, which are always impelling and, as it were, dragging us violently to evil, have over our reasoning will? And if we do not bravely resist them, can we remain long free from sin? But we cannot resist them without doing violence to ourselves in many things, combating our evil desires, and practising mortification constantly. Now, he who is always seeking his comfort, thinks of nothing but enjoying himself, and has nothing but disgust and aversion for all that displeases him, how can he use that violence towards himself? And if he still hopes that he is on the right road to heaven, what a deceitful hope is his?

No matter how innocent pleasures seem to be in the beginning, if one becomes too much attached to them, and gives himself up to them without restraint, they take from him all relish for heavenly things; the precious time given him for the sole purpose of attending to the business of his salvation is, generally speaking, frittered away; he has no desire for prayer, fasting, or visiting the church; the duties of his state of life are neglected on account of difficulties that arise in performing them; he seldom hears the word of God in sermons, if the hour appointed for the sermon is too early, or the weather too cold; and meanwhile, for weeks and months, he neither hears, reads, or thinks of anything that could encourage him in the service of God. With regard to the fasting prescribed by the Church, since it is contrary to his bodily comfort, he finds all sorts of pretexts to dispense himself from it; his mind becomes indisposed for good works, his understanding darkened, his reason perverted; all his thoughts and faculties he directs, like the dumb brute, to his mere temporal wants, and he whose desires should be in heaven, his future country, is no longer capable of any other knowledge than that of which St. James says that it is brutish and diabolical: "This is not wisdom descending from above, but earthly, sensual, devilish."¹ He becomes the slave of his own body, to which he devotes all his cares and anxieties by day and by night, nay, he sacrifices to it his whole life; and thus he places

Pleasures, when indulged in too much, make a man brutish.

¹ Non est enim ista sapientia desursum descendens: sed terrena, animalis, diabolica.—James III. 15.

his last end in those pleasures and enjoyments which, used in due order and moderation, should serve as a means of preserving his health in order the better to do the will of God and attend to his soul's welfare; a de-ordination, as St. Augustine says, that contains all the deformity of mortal sin. When the patriarch Noe sent out the raven from the ark, why did it not return? Would it not have been well off in the ark? Yes, but it saw the carrion floating about, that was its ordinary food, and it fell upon it at once, and left Noe, who had hitherto cared for it. Even so is it at last with those slaves of their bodies. Once they have acquired a taste for earthly things, they think no more of God, they forget the future life, and would not set much store by the happiness of heaven, if they could be sure of enjoying themselves forever here on earth. "The heaven of heavens is the Lord's," they would say; "but the earth He has given to the children of men."¹

As Solomon
experi-
enced.

When the wise, and at first pious, innocent, and holy Solomon made that resolution, "I said in my heart: I will go and abound with delights, and enjoy good things,"² what was the consequence of it? He did not intend to offend God, nor had he the least idea of forgetting Him and adoring false gods; his only desire was to enjoy pleasures that in themselves were lawful and becoming, according to the law of the time; and yet, since he gave himself up to them too much, and used them inordinately, what became of him at last? "And when he was now old," says the Book of Kings (that is, as commentators say, in his fifty-second year), "his heart was turned away by women." Oh, "I will go and abound with delights, and enjoy good things!" And what was the result? His wisdom was turned to such blindness and folly, that he forgot himself, his God, and heaven, built magnificent temples for the false gods of his concubines, and bent the knee before idols of wood and stone: "His heart was turned away by women to follow strange gods; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God."³

So that a
too easy life
is not the
way to
heaven.

See how dangerous and sinful an easy and luxurious life is. It is that broad and spacious way of which Our Lord speaks in the Gospel of St. Matthew, with moaning and lamentation: "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth," not to heaven, but "to destruction;" and, alas, "many there are who

¹ Cœlum cœli Domino, terram autem dedit filiis hominum.—Ps. cxiii. 16.

² Dixi ego in corde meo: vadam et affluam deliciis, et fruam bonis.—Eccles. ii. 1.

³ Cumque jam esset senex, depravatum est cor ejus per mulieres, ut sequeretur deos alienos: nec erat cor ejus perfectum cum Domino Deo suo.—III. Kings xi. 4.

go in thereat.”¹ This is the life of which the Prophet Job long ago complained : “ They take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ : they spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to hell.”² Therefore, my dear brethren, the flesh must not be treated too delicately in this life ; it should be dealt with severely, if we wish to possess heaven. Hitherto I have explained such reasons as should induce all men in general to avoid a luxurious life ; now I go on to show that, as far as Christians in particular are concerned, a life of that kind is not one that can lead them to heaven. Such is the subject of the

Second Part.

Mark what I am about to say. Either another heaven must be made for us ; or another way leading to it, different from that followed by the first Christians ; or there must be a different doctrine from that preached to the first Christians by the apostles throughout the world ; or the God of our days must be differently disposed, so that He will give us heaven on easier terms than those on which our ancestors purchased it ; or else no Christian can go to heaven who does not lead a true Christian life. There can be no doubt of that. Now, the heaven that we have to expect is not different from that which the first Christians worked for : “ from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.”³ There is no other way but the old one to lead to this heaven : “ How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life ; and few there are that find it ! ”⁴ The same doctrine of Jesus Christ is now preached, which He commanded His apostles to teach throughout the world, so that His words still hold good : “ But He said to them : strive to enter by the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter, and shall not be able.”⁵ And, finally, we have the same God, who is immutable in His councils and designs : “ For I am the Lord, and I change not.”⁶ Everything remains as it was. Therefore

A Christian who wishes to go to heaven must lead a Christian life.

¹ Lata porta, et spatiosa via est, quæ ducit ad perditionem ; et multi sunt qui intrant per eam.—Matt. vii. 13.

² Tenent tympanum et citharam, et gaudent ad sonitum organi ; ducunt in bonis diebus, et in puncto ad inferna descendunt.—Job xxi. 12, 13.

³ A diebus autem Joannis Baptistæ usque nunc, regnum cælorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matt. xi. 12.

⁴ Quam angusta porta, et arcta via est, quæ ducit ad vitam ; et pauci sunt qui inveniunt eam.—Ibid. vii. 14.

⁵ Ipse autem dixit ad illos : contendite intrare per angustam portam : quia multi, dico vobis, querent intrare, et non poterunt.—Luke xiii. 23, 24.

⁶ Ego enim Dominus, et non mutor.—Malach. iii. 6.

he who does not imitate the life of the first Christians cannot reasonably put forward a claim to the heaven of the Christians. This is again an undoubted truth.

An easy, sensual life is not a Christian one, because it is contrary to the promise made in baptism.

Now, he does not lead a Christian life, who does not keep the promise he made in baptism; he does not lead a Christian life, whose life is contrary to that of Jesus Christ; he does not lead a Christian life, who does not keep the Christian law. But none of these three conditions can be observed in an easy, luxurious life. And, in the first place, in what does our profession consist? We all took a solemn and public oath, when we were made Christians and were admitted into the number of the children of God in holy baptism. "I renounce," were the words we used, uttered in our stead by another, but which we ratified when we came to the use of reason. "I renounce." What? The world and its pomps and vanities; the devil and his works; the flesh and its desires. That is, I bind myself forever to mortify the inclination I have inherited for the empty honors and pomps of the world; I bind myself forever to crucify my flesh, and to die to my sensuality; once for all I bid good-bye to all forbidden, dangerous, and superfluous pleasures. An obligation, my dear brethren, that we publicly undertook before the altar in the church, in presence of the angels as witnesses, and in sight of heaven and earth, as St. Ambrose says. A promise that is written down, not in the registry of our baptism, but in the book of our lives; a vow subscribed by God Himself, which is more binding and unchangeable than any promise or obligation that men can bind each other with in this world. Therefore Tertullian calls Christians, "Religious of the Cross,"¹ who make their profession to the Cross, promising during their whole lives to seek, love, and bear it constantly; while St. Paul says that baptism is a crucifixion, a death and burial of man. "For we are buried together with Him by baptism in to death,"² he writes to the Romans, so that we must henceforth live for Christ alone, and die to all the desires of corrupt nature, to the flesh and its sensualities. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer. . . . Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof."³

¹ *Crucis religiosos.*

² *Consepulti enim sumus cum illo per baptismum in mortem.—Rom. vi. 4.*

³ *Hoc scientes, quia vetus homo noster simul crucifixus est, ut destruat corpus peccati, et ultra non serviamus peccato . . . Non ergo regnet peccatum in vestro mortali corpore. ut obediat concupiscentiis ejus.—Rom. vi. 6, 12.*

Now, O luxurious man, how can you keep this promise and vow, if you always treat your body so delicately, seek its comfort in all things, gratify all its desires, and avoid crosses and discomforts as long as you can? No, in the life you lead you cannot keep your promise; you are a perjured, unfaithful, unjust renegade, who have only the name of a Christian.

Further, what is a Christian? Do you think, perhaps, that the few drops of water that were poured on your head in baptism alone suffice to make you one? No doubt, they are necessary, but they are not sufficient. What, then, is a true Christian? He is a man, says St. Bernard, whose chief and greatest business it is to follow Christ, to take Him as his Model, and to regulate his life according to that of Christ. "In vain," are the words of the Saint, "in vain am I a Christian, if I do not follow Christ."¹ "God became man," says St. John Chrysostom, "that man might become, as it were, God; He made Himself like to us, not merely to redeem us, but that we might lead a life like to His. 'For I have given you an example,' He says Himself, by way of exhortation to all men, 'that as I have done to you, so you do also.'"² In a word, it is an undoubted fact that we must become conformable to the image of the Son of God, if we wish to be amongst the number of those whom God has elected to eternal life, as St. Paul expressly says. Now, O voluptuary, compare your effeminate life with that of Jesus Christ, and see what a startling contrast it makes. Christ, poor and stripped of all earthly things; you, with your heart buried in the perishable goods of earth; Christ, torn in every part of His body with scourges; you, in such comfort that the prick of a needle is intolerable to you. You will not hear of overcoming yourself unless there is question of gratifying your sensuality. Christ, a man of sorrows; you, a child of joys; Christ, under the cross, and on the cross even to death, while you dream of nothing but pleasures, and cannot bear even the name of adversity. Could two more inharmonious things be well brought together, than the life of Christ and yours? And, therefore, what a dangerous sign of eternal reprobation that is for you. When, on your death-bed, they will place the crucifix in your hands, will it be a source of consolation, think you, and not rather a presage of your eternal damnation? The death of Christ is of no use to you, unless you endeavor to make your life resemble His.

Because it is quite contrary to the life of Christ.

¹ Frustra sum Christianus, si Christum non sequor.

² Exemplum enim decet vobis, ut quemadmodum ego feci vobis, ita et vos faciatis.—John xiii. 15.

“And they that are Christ’s,” is the oft-repeated admonition of the Apostle, “have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences.”¹

Because it
is contrary
to the Chris-
tian law.

Finally, even if you had not renounced in baptism the flesh and its concupiscences; if Christ was not proposed to you as the model you have to imitate; would you not still be obliged, if you wish to be a Christian, to obey the Christian law? What is that law? Read the New Testament, that has been written for Christians, and you will find that it inculcates nothing more frequently than self-denial, mortification, and the crucifying of one’s self. For the sake of brevity I will quote but a few passages from the lips of Christ Himself. “Whosoever doth not carry his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”² “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal. If any man minister to Me, let him follow Me.”³ The Epistles of St. Paul are full of exhortations to the effect that the goods of this world must be enjoyed, even by those who possess them in abundance, with such moderation and in such a spirit of detachment, as if they did not possess them. “It remaineth,” he writes to the Corinthians, “that they also who have wives be as if they had none. . . and they that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as if they used it not.”⁴ Do you think that this is, perhaps, but an exhortation to do a work of supererogation, and not a positive command? But how can that be? Are we not commanded to follow Christ, in order to enter heaven with Him? But that cannot be done without bearing daily crosses, trials, and mortifications. If there is no command to deny one’s self in this life, why does Our Lord threaten with the loss of their souls those who neglect doing so? If we are not commanded to lead mortified lives, why does St. Paul exclude the effeminate from the kingdom of God? “Nor the effeminate shall possess the kingdom of God.”⁵

¹ Qui autem sunt Christi, carnem suam crucifixerunt cum vitiis et concupiscentiis.—Gal. v. 24.

² Qui non bajulat crucem suam, et venit post me non, potest meus esse discipulus.—Luke xiv. 27.

³ Qui amat animam suam perdet eam; et qui odit animam suam in hoc mundo, in vitam æternam custodit eam. Si quis mihi ministrat, me sequatur.—John xii. 25, 26.

⁴ Reliquum est, ut et qui habent uxores, tanquam non habentes sint. . . et qui gaudent, tanquam non gaudentes, et qui emunt, tanquam non possidentes, et qui utuntur hoc mundo, tanquam non utantur.—I. Cor. vii. 29–31.

⁵ Neque molles regnum Dei possidebunt.—I Cor. vi. 10.

But, you say, that applies to the apostles and disciples of Christ, and to religious in convents, who imitate them; it is not for me and other people in the world. What? Does it not hold good for you in the world? Then the Gospel of Christ is not for you, either. If mortification and bearing the cross are recommended as a necessary thing to religious in convents, how much more necessary is it not for you, who are exposed to so many dangers in the world? They who do their best to lead holy lives cannot enter heaven without mortification and crucifying themselves, and you expect to get there without denying yourself anything, and by leading an easy, luxurious life. And where did you see it written that such doctrine is applicable only to the apostles of Christ, and to religious in convents? Do we not read in the same place the express words of Christ, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me"? And is it not expressly stated that "He said to all," those words? No, He spoke not for the apostles alone, but for all; not for religious in convents alone, but for people of all states, conditions, and dignities. All without exception and without dispensation, just as none are dispensed from following Christ, must deny themselves and take up their cross. "And He said to all: If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself," etc. Therefore it holds good for you, as well as for me; for the rich, as well as for the poor; for the noble, as well as for the lowly; for the innocent, as well as for the guilty. "He said to all," and, amongst others, to that dissolute youth and wanton young woman, who imagine that now is the time for them to enjoy themselves; to that man, that woman, who fritter away their time in visiting, and in idle amusements; and to all of us, no matter who we are, that we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, overcome our evil inclinations, mortify and crucify our flesh, and enter on the rough way of penance; otherwise we shall not lead Christian lives or belong to Christ, or have any claim to the eternal kingdom of heaven.

Most dangerous, then, not to say unhappy, is the state of those who live in abundance of all temporal goods, who have everything they desire, and use all they have for their bodily comfort and for the gratification of their senses. They have just reason for fearing that they are of the number of those whom Christ threatens with woe, because they have their conso-

Which
binds all
Christians.

Therefore
they who
live luxur-
tiously, are
in a danger-
ous state.

¹ Dicebat autem ad omnes : si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam quotidie, et sequatur me.—Luke ix. 23.

lation here; to fear that they are amongst those of whom Origen writes: "the prosperity of the present life is for those who have no hope of future happiness;"¹ to fear that they are walking on that broad and pleasant way that leads to destruction and eternal ruin; to fear that one day will be spoken of them the words of the Apocalypse: "As much as she hath glorified herself and lived in delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give ye to her,"² unless they are all the more careful in holding in check their evil inclinations, in avoiding sin, and in serving God zealously in their prosperity by practising the virtues of their state; and that they can hardly do for any length of time without mortification of the body and its senses.

While the
poor and
industrious
may be con-
soled and
pity the
others.

But, on the other hand, you poor and needy mortals, who suffer want in many things, who have to labor hard for your daily bread, whose flesh is tamed by weakness and illness, by trials and troubles of all kinds, be comforted, rejoice, and be glad that the good God has removed from you the occasion of leading an easy, luxurious, and dangerous life. He Himself inflicts on you, as we have seen already, the penance you should have otherwise inflicted on yourselves; for if you bear your daily trials, troubles, and annoyances with a good intention for God's sake, you will have mortifications enough. "Do not envy those who enjoy prosperity in this world," says with reason St. Peter Damian, "but rather condole with them,"³ although we must not give way to rash judgments against our neighbor. We cannot see everything, and therefore we are often deceived by outward appearances. Many a one seems to us to lead an easy, indolent life, who has in reality secret trials and crosses enough to bear, that cause him a great deal of suffering, or else he may, unknown to us, afflict himself by voluntary mortifications. The silken garment sometimes conceals the rough hair-shirt; even at a well-furnished table the taste is often severely mortified by being deprived of some favorite article of food, and frequently, while the laugh is on the lips, the heart is devoured with anguish. Still, generally speaking, I say of those who really lead an easy, luxurious life, no matter who they are, "do not envy them, but rather condole with them;" do not grudge them the happiness they appear to enjoy, but, rather, have the greatest pity for them; "for like unreasoning beasts they are hastening, even while feast-

¹ Præsens sæculum eorum est, qui futuræ beatitudinis non habent spem.

² Quantum gloriificavit se, et in deliciis fuit, tantum date illi tormentum et luctum.—Apoc. xviii. 7.

³ Noll hujus vitæ felicitatem hominibus invidere, sed condole.

ing, to the slaughter-house." ¹ You, indeed, now weep, while they laugh; you suffer hunger and thirst, while they abound in everything; you are plagued with severe labor, while they lead idle, sensual lives; but be content with what God has ordained for you; the time will come when you will laugh, and they will weep; when you will be filled, and they will suffer hunger and thirst like dogs; when you will rejoice in endless peace and delights, while they will be eternally tormented.

May I, my dear brethren, bring forward a fable by way of conclusion? It is, of course, and remains but a fable; yet it will serve to explain the truth which we are now considering. A dog, that had been for many years chained at his master's door, once saw opposite him a pig that was being fattened. Every morning, noon, and evening the latter used to receive whole trough-fuls of food, to the great discontent and envy of the dog, who at last lost patience and began to snarl and growl at the pig. What? he said, such an ugly beast gets plenty to eat, while I must suffer hunger? He is not of the least use to any one, and can only annoy his master with his grunting, while I have to remain here in heat and cold to keep guard over my master's house and chattels, and to protect his money from thieves. Yet the useless pig gets more than he can eat, while the most that is given to me is but a dry bone or a piece of musty bread that has happened to fall from the table and got trodden under foot, while, if I chance to go too near the servants, I get a beating. Now can that be just? Thus growling and grumbling he hid himself in his kennel, full of vexation. A few mornings after he heard a most woful screaming, and sprang out at once to see what was the matter, when he beheld the butcher dragging out the pig by the ears, throwing it down violently on the ground, and then sticking a long knife into its heart; and when he had thus put an end to the pig's screaming, he threw the body into a trough, pouring boiling water over it, tore away the bristles and the skin, and then, having split it open, hung it up on a pole. The dog kept on wagging his tail, not knowing what to make of the whole affair. At last said he to himself: is that, then, the end of all that stuffing and feeding? If so, I will be satisfied with my dry bone; and he went quite contented into his kennel again. O poor and suffering Christians, you say sometimes, with discontent, how happy those gentlemen and ladies must be! They have nothing but pleasures and enjoyments in

For the end
of both will
be very dif-
ferent.
Shown by a
fable.

¹ Quia nimirum velut bruta animalia ad macellum edendo properant.

their lives. O how unequal is the lot of people in this world! I must toil like a slave, and even then can hardly get enough to eat. What do they do for God more than I? I do my best to serve Him, and please Him, and yet I have to suffer bitter trials; one difficulty comes after another; one cross succeeds the other. But cease your complaints, you who think thus. Have courage, and wait for the end, and then you will see what will happen. They, if they lead vicious lives, will be hurried to the terrible slaughter-house after their feasting here, like dumb beasts; while you, if you bear your trials for God's sake, will find rest and peace. "So they did eat and were filled exceedingly," says the Prophet David of the Israelites, "they were not defrauded of that which they craved." And how did things go with them? "As yet their meat was in their mouth, and the wrath of God came upon them; and He slew the fat ones among them."¹ Cardinal Hugo remarks on these words; "therefore let the lean cattle rejoice; for not they are killed, but the fat ones."² The rich glutton was a fatted swine of this kind, as St. Luke tells us: He "was clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously every day,"³ while poor Lazarus had to suffer the pangs of hunger: "who lay at his gate full of sores, desiring to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and no one did give him."⁴ But how different it was with them at the end! When the rich man was fattened up, the butcher death came: "the rich man also died, and he was buried in hell."⁵ And what became of Lazarus? "It came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom."⁶ Why was the rich man condemned to suffer in hell? "Son," answered Abraham, "remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime."⁷ Why was Lazarus brought into the joys of heaven? "and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."⁸

Conclusion
and resolu-

O just God, is that the way things go in this world? Is that

¹ Manducaverunt et saturati sunt nimis; non sunt fraudati a desiderio suo. Escæ eorum erant in ore ipsorum, et ira Dei ascendit super eos, et occidit pingues eorum.—Ps. lxxvii. 20—31.

² Gaudeant ergo macilentæ pecudes, qui non occiduntur, sed pingues.

³ Indubeatur purpura, et bysso, et epulabatur quotidie splendide.—Luke xvi. 19.

⁴ Jacebat ad januam ejus, ulceribus plenus, cupiens saturari de micis, quæ cadebant de mensa divitis, et nemo illi dabat.—Ibid. 20, 21.

⁵ Mortuus est autem et dives, et sepultus est in inferno.—Ibid. 22.

⁶ Factum est autem ut moreretur mendicis, et portaretur ab angelis in sinum Abraham.—Ibid.

⁷ Fili, recordare quia receperisti bona in vita tua.—Ibid. 25.

⁸ Et Lazarus similiter mala: nunc autem hic consolatur; tu vero cruciaris.—Ibid.

the end of an easy, luxurious life, and of a mortified, penitential one? Oh, if such is the case, I do not wish to enjoy pleasures! I will in future be content with my state, and will leave abundance to those who wish to have it. Let others eat, drink, and sleep well; let them pamper their bodies, and laugh and enjoy themselves; my desire is, O God, to sacrifice my body to Thy will, to chastise my flesh, and give it up to mortification and self-denial, so that I may save my soul forever; for I cannot have two heavens, one here, and another hereafter. If, therefore, I have now to sigh, with the afflicted Job on the dung-hill: "The flesh being consumed, my bone hath cleaved to my skin,"¹ I will also console myself with the same Job, saying, "I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God: this my hope is laid up in my bosom."² In this flesh of mine, which is now mortified and afflicted; in this flesh, which is now emaciated by daily labor; in this flesh, which is now often tormented by hunger and thirst, and want and poverty; in this flesh, which is now worn out by illness and weakness, and tried by all kinds of contradictions, in this flesh I shall see my God, and I reserve all my comfort and pleasure until then. Amen.

tion to lead
mortified
lives.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the Fifth Sunday in Lent.

Text.

Quis ex vobis arguet me de peccato?—John viii. 46.

"Which of you shall convince Me of sin?"

Introduction.

What Christ said to the Pharisees, who, being filled with envy, found fault with all He did, He says, it seems to me, on this Passion Sunday to all Christians, but especially to those tenderlings, who shirk the works of mortification and penance of which we have spoken during the Lent: "Which of you shall convince Me of sin?" I have never done the least thing to render penance necessary for Me; never have I committed the least sin, nor could I commit one, so that I need not be on My guard against it; never have the senses of My body been inclined to evil, so that I need not keep them in check; and yet, I, your God, spent My life in penance and mortification, in order to show

¹ *Pelli mee, consumptis carnibus, adhæsit os meum.*—Job. xix. 20.

² *Rursum circumdabor pelle mea, et in carne mea videbo Deum meum. Reposita est hæc spes mea in sinu meo.*—Ibid. 26, 27.

you how you, too, must live. My dear brethren, we must all agree to this; there is no contradicting it. For if we wish to enter with Christ into glory, we must necessarily suffer with Him, and deny and mortify ourselves, as we have seen more in detail on a former occasion; he who treats himself too delicately cannot go to heaven. And that is what I undertake to prove to-day, and I say:—*Plan of Discourse as above.*

ON FASTING AND ALMS-GIVING AS A MEANS OF SATISFYING FOR SIN.

FORTIETH SERMON.

ON THE OBLIGATION OF FASTING.

Subject.

1. We can and must fast for forty days; such is the law that binds Christians under pain of grievous sin. 2. We are not obliged or are not able to fast in the manner prescribed; such is the vain pretext of many sensual Christians.—*Preached on the first Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Cum jejunasset quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus.
—Matt. iv. 2.

“When He had fasted forty days and forty nights.”

Introduction.

You terrible Lent, are you back again? Must we again suffer hunger? And there is not even a dispensation for eating meat! Alas, how will I be able to stand that? Forty whole days, one after the other! It is too much; I shall die before Easter. Such are the complaints I seem to hear from some over-delicate Christians, who look on the obligation of fasting as a most terrible one, and shrink from it as they would from being flayed alive. But be comforted; it will not kill you. For, not to lose any more time in the introduction, there is no doubt that—

Plan of Discourse.

We can and must fast for forty days; such is the law that binds Christians under pain of grievous sin, as I shall show in the first part. We are not obliged, or are unable to fast in the manner prescribed; such is the vain pretext of many sensual Christians. This we shall examine in the second part. But if the first is true,

then the second must be false, as we shall see in the conclusion, to the consolation of those who are compelled by want to fast almost all the year, since they have neither fish nor flesh to eat, and to the encouragement of all others, that they may religiously observe the forty days' fast, according to the custom of good Christians.

Christ Jesus, Model of those who fast, give us Thy grace to this end: we beg it of Thee through the merits of Thy Mother Mary, and of our holy guardian angels.

The obligation of the forty days' fast arises not only from the law of the Church.

We must observe the fast of forty days; we are bound to do so, and there is not the least doubt of it. The law binding Christians to that effect is clear and well-known throughout the whole Catholic world. Nor is it a mere human law, or an invention of the Popes, as most people imagine, who therefore make little account of it; nay, in some places the thing has gone so far that people violate the fast and eat meat without any dispensation, like heretics, thinking that it makes no matter, as the law of fasting is only a Papal law. Such people show clearly that they have departed from sound Catholic doctrine; for they either do not look on the Pope as the only visible head of the Church on earth, or else they do not consider themselves under any obligation to obey his laws and commands. Both these errors are condemned as heretical. Even if the forty days' fast were an invention of the Popes, and were imposed by them on the Church at large, would not that fact alone be a sufficient reason to make it obligatory in conscience for every child of the Church? Not the least doubt of it.

But from Christ and His apostles.

Now, the law of fasting is a tradition that we receive from its author, Our Lord Jesus Christ, through His apostles and their successors. St. Jerome writes to Marcella plainly enough on the matter: "we fast for forty days at a suitable time, according to apostolic tradition."¹ The holy Pope, St. Leo, writes, "What every Christian ought to do at all times, let us now do with greater care and devotion, that the apostolic ordinance of the forty days' fast may be observed."² This is the reason, says St. Ambrose,³ why Christ, the Son of God, who was not in need of penance, spent forty days and nights without eating or drinking, namely, "to show us that we, too, must follow His example and

¹ Nos unam quadragesimam secundum traditionem Apostolorum tempore nobis congruo jejunamus.

² Ut Apostolica constitutio quadraginta dierum jejuniis impleatur.—St. Leo, Sermon. de quadrag.

³ Ut nobis exemplo esset hoc jejunium.—S. Ambrosius, Epistola lxxxi. ad Verulam.

fast for the same time." From which he draws the following conclusion: "therefore, if any Christian does not observe the days devoted to fasting, he is guilty of disobedience and obstinacy in violating, by eating, the law of fasting that God has imposed on him for the good of his soul,"¹ so that we must fast, and are bound under a grievous obligation to observe the Lenten fast. From this it follows, without further argument, that we can observe the forty days' fast; for Christ would not have imposed on us a law that is impossible of fulfilment.

And to what does this law oblige us, since we do not hesitate to urge excuses against fulfilling it? It is not nearly as severe now as it was in olden times, amongst the early Christians, who were obliged to abstain, not only from meat, but also from everything that comes from meat, such as eggs, milk, butter, etc., and not merely that, but even from fish, spices, and wine, so that there was hardly anything they could eat except bread, salt, oil, and vegetables, and that only once a day, in the afternoon, for they knew nothing of a collation, and their evening repast was kept as strictly in the bounds of moderation as our collation now is, according to Tertullian, St. Athanasius, St. Epiphanius, St. John Chrysostom, St. Paulinus, and others who lived while that method of fasting was in vogue. And that method they had all to follow, without exception; no one dreamt of asking a dispensation. St. Bernard, speaking of Lent, says: "hitherto we religious have been the only ones to fast during the whole year; but now kings and princes, clergy and people, the noble and the lowly, the rich and the poor, all will join with us in fasting till the evening."² Even if the obligation of fasting were so strict nowadays, we should have no right to object, or to say, I cannot observe it; for all Christians have already observed it in former times, for many hundred years. How much less reason, then, have we now to allege impossibility as an excuse, since the Catholic Church, which has received from Jesus Christ full power to that effect, has lessened the severity of the law of fasting to such an extent, that it seems a mere trifle when compared to the strict observances of former times? For there is only one kind of food forbidden to us during this Lent, and that is meat; all other articles of food we may use, provided that, with the exception of Sundays, we eat a full meal but once a

Difficult as that law was for the early Christians, it is easy enough now.

¹ Quisquis ergo Christianus consecratam jejuniis non impleverit quadragesimam, pravaricationis et contumaciae reus tenebitur, quod legem divinitus pro salute sua datam prandendo ipse rescindit.—Serm. xxxiii.

² Serm. iiii. de quadrag.

day, and a slight collation in the evening. That is all we have to do now.

Therefore, since Adam sinned most grievously by violating a very easy command,

And must we look on that as an intolerable burden? Is there any Christian who will try to excuse himself from it by saying that he cannot observe it, or is not bound to do so? The very easiness with which the precept of the Lenten fast can now be obeyed makes more evident the guilt of him who deliberately violates it. In order to understand this better, my dear brethren, consider the violation of the divine command of which our first parents were guilty in Paradise. The holy Fathers, the commentators of the Holy Scripture, and the doctors of the Church can hardly find words strong enough to express the fearful malice of this first sin, which we, unhappy descendants of Adam, have still reason to regret in this vale of tears. The Abbot Rupert says that "no one can rightly estimate its malice."¹ And in what, then, does this malice consist? If we look at the matter according to the ordinary principles of theology, not only will it not appear so terrible to us, but we shall even find a difficulty in making a mortal sin out of it. For, what was the sin that Adam committed in Paradise? He ate of a fruit that God had forbidden him to touch. That was all. But that cannot be, at the farthest, any worse than a venial sin. For theologians teach us that there cannot be a grievous obligation regarding a thing that is, of its kind, small and unimportant (with the exception of the matter of impurity, on account of the danger of sin which is always there, and for several other reasons besides). Thus, for instance, it is a sin to take a farthing from a rich man unjustly, for it is a violation of the command, "thou shalt not steal:" but since the matter of the theft is so small, the sin is only a venial one. Now, to eat a piece of a fruit, nay, even a whole apple, is, if we consider the matter alone, a very trifling affair. Why, then, should such a sin be reckoned as a most grievous one in the divine judgments, and as a most fearful sin, the malice of which no man can understand? St. Thomas of Aquin tells us why. The gravity of this offence must be measured by the circumstances, and not by the smallness of the matter of it; and, "according to those circumstances, that sin was a most grievous one."² What were they? Mark, my dear brethren, the manner and the words in which God imposed the command on Adam: "And He commanded him, saying: Of every tree of Paradise

¹ Magnitudinem ejus nullus est qui æstimare possit.—Rup. Abb. de oper. tr. l. i.

² Et secundum has peccatum illud habuit maximam gravitatem.—St. Thom. II. 2. q. 63.

thou shalt eat: but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death.”¹ It was as if God wished to say: behold, Adam, turn round and see the beautiful garden that is made for your use and pleasure; see the beauty of its trees and flowers, the different herbs and vegetables it produces, and the sweetness of its countless fruits. All these things you can use when and how you please; but there is one tree that I reserve to Myself, in order to test your obedience, and under pain of temporal and eternal death you are forbidden to taste of it. Oh, certainly a most easy law to observe! But what did Adam do? In the midst of the superabundant delights that were at his free disposal he stretched out his hand, in order to please his wife, to that one tree that he was forbidden to taste of under pain of death. This, says Rupert, was the transgression of which no one is able to estimate the magnitude; “for, in the midst of the joys and delights of Paradise, he was unwilling to abstain from the one forbidden fruit.”²

Now to our subject, my dear brethren. When we consider the great number and variety of creatures on the earth, in the air, the sea, and the rivers, that God has prepared for the nourishment and food of man, might we not say that we have a kind of earthly paradise? There are all kinds of crops in the fields, all kinds of fruit on the trees, all kinds of wholesome and nourishing vegetables in the gardens; what a superabundance of these things there is on earth! And, then, what a great variety of animals, wild and tame, of birds, of domestic fowls, and of fishes in the waters. What a number of savory dishes can be made of those things that are procured from beasts! And the good God says, as it were, to each one of us Christians, behold, all these things I give you to use as you please; eat and drink of them when you can have them, according to your means and observing the laws of moderation, for the preservation of your health: but one article of food alone I reserve, which you must now abstain from for My sake, and that but for forty days; all the others you can use once a day, till you are fully satisfied. Is it credible, my dear brethren, that any true Christian can be found to object to such a command as this, or to say that it is too difficult to be observed? Or that any one would hesitate to obey humbly such a

So also he who breaks the law of fasting sins grievously.

¹ Præceptique ei dicens: ex omni ligno paradisi comede: de ligno autem scientiæ boni et mali ne comedas: in quocumque enim die comederis ex eo, morte morieris.—Gen. ii. 16, 17.

² Qui in tali voluptatis loco, delictis affluent, vetito pomo inhiavit.

generous Creator, or would eat meat without urgent necessity, in spite of the express command to the contrary, or would otherwise violate the law of fasting? I can hardly imagine that any one would be so inconsiderate; otherwise, if we have to measure the magnitude of his guilt according to what the Abbot Rupert says of the sin of our first parents, "there is no one who can rightly estimate its malice." And yet, alas, how many half-Catholics there are who refuse to observe this easy law! We are not bound to fast in that way, they say; nay, we cannot fast in that way. Let us hear what they have to say for themselves by way of excuse, in the

Second Part.

The many
pretexts
that are al-
leged to
evade the
law of fast-
ing are
generally
grounded
on anxiety
for one's
health.

Children, who have not completed their twenty-first year, old people, who have reached their sixtieth, laborers and others, who have to work hard the whole day, sick, delicate, and convalescent people, mothers who are nursing, and others of the kind, have, indeed, good reason for saying that they cannot observe the law of fasting, at least as far as eating only one full meal in the day is concerned; although, as St. Basil testifies, among the early Christians even those people would be bound to fast strictly. Further, they who are either actually sick or are recovering from illness have also good reason for being dispensed from the law prescribing abstinence from flesh-meat; and, in fact, a general dispensation to that effect is granted where sufficient reason exists, so that such people may eat meat without violating the law of fasting. Of excuses of that kind I do not speak. But how many other people there are, of both sexes, who seek for all sorts of pretexts, furnished by their self-love, in order to evade the Christian law of fasting, so that they either turn the evening collation into a full meal, or else pamper their appetites with flesh-meat. A delicate constitution, natural weakness, weariness of the limbs, headache, a weak stomach, want of sleep and discomfort at night, catarrhs and injuries to the health that might arise from eating fish; such are, generally speaking, the great orators that persuade such people that they are justified in saying, I am not bound to fast, I cannot do it; I must eat meat, or else my health will suffer.

These ex-
cuses are
generally of
no avail.

But if these causes were sufficient to dispense you from the law of fasting, there would hardly be any one in the world bound to observe it, and the forty days' fast would be a useless and idle law. For where is the man in the world who is not

subject to some bodily weakness or other? These bodily ills are consequences of original sin, and are the rightful inheritance of our human nature. We are all made of the same clay. I know well that the love we have for our bodies grows up with us from our tenderest years, and that we are bound by the natural law to love them. I acknowledge that we are not lords and masters, but rather caretakers of our health, our bodies, and our lives, and therefore we are not allowed to neglect them altogether. But it is also certain that we must not act towards them as if we lived only for the sake of the body, for we must care for the body only in so far as is necessary in order to render it serviceable to the soul. Hence, not our sensual appetites and our bodily comfort, but the eternal salvation of our immortal souls, should have the preference in all things. When God proclaims to us by His Church the law of the Lenten fast, is it perhaps His intention to ruin our health and shorten our lives? Certainly not. Is He, then, ignorant of what our bodily strength can bear? By no means. How, then, can we dare to make an exception of ourselves in a command that is given to all Christians in general, and to pretend that it is impossible for us to observe that command, or that we are not bound to observe it? "The excuse you allege," says the *Glossa*, "is a temptation; because you are more anxious about the food of the body than about that of the mind."¹

I have asked the doctor about it, they say generally, and according to him fish is very bad for my health; therefore I am not bound to fast, and can eat meat with a good conscience. And because the doctor tells you that, you think it is quite enough? But a great many mistakes are made in that way. The doctor, you must know, has no power to dispense in the law of fasting; all he can do is to declare that you have a reasonable cause for asking a dispensation. He acts as confessors do, who express their opinion according to what their penitent tells them. In the same way the doctor tells you that you can eat meat, but on the supposition that what you tell him is the truth. If you are really as weak as you say; if your stomach is in bad order; if your head is so weak; if you are really in danger of losing your health, and there is no other way of helping you, then, of course, you can eat meat, that is, you have a good reason for asking a dispensation. But if your weakness is, as is generally the case, merely imaginary, if your fears are founded on self-love, sensual-

And in most cases, the doctor's opinion is not sufficient cause for dispensing one's self.

¹ Persuasio tua tentatio est; quia agis de cibo corporis, non de cibo mentis.

ity, love of comfort, gluttony, and dread of self-denial and Christian mortification. of what good will the dispensation you seek for be in the sight of God, although you have the doctor's opinion in favor of it? The excuse you allege is a temptation; the idea you have of your inability to fast is only a suggestion of your sensuality. But, you say, I know by experience that fish is not good for me. Well, then, who compels you to eat fish? Let it be, and eat something else. But that would be difficult and hard to do. Quite so, and that is precisely the reason of the law of fasting; it must be hard and difficult.

Many fast constantly and severely, and are yet in good health.

Oh, what a great number of people there are among the lower classes, who, besides having to work hard every day, hardly see a bit of meat oftener than once or twice a year, while they are just as badly off with regard to fish; and yet they are able to enjoy good health on their fare of bread and vegetables. They can do without meat for a year at a time, while you are afraid to abstain from it for a few weeks during the Lent! How many people there are, of both sexes, in convents and monasteries, who spend their whole lives without eating meat, or anything that comes from meat; and yet they reach a ripe old age. St. Hilarion was eighty years old, St. Pachomius a hundred and ten, SS. Antony, Arsenius, and Romuald lived to be a hundred and twenty. And what ascetic lives they led! Did they have meat outside of Lent? Or fish prepared with all kinds of delicious sauces during Lent? No, indeed; dry bread, herbs, and vegetables were their food, pure water their drink, and even these things they did not eat their fill of, unless on some great feast days, as we learn from SS. Jerome and Athanasius. Thus they fasted the whole year through, while they slept for a few hours on the bare ground, and scourged and chastised their bodies in different ways, and yet they enjoyed good health. Who of those people in the world who deny themselves no bodily comfort, lead idle lives, and seek out the most delicate viands for the sake of preserving their health, who of them, I say, ever attains to such a hale old age, as the Fathers of the desert did, in the midst of their fasting and austerities? Yes, they say; but people in those days were different. Yes, they were different; they were more pious, God-fearing, and desirous of their salvation than we are. You and I, O Christian, are not required to fast so strictly. All that we have to do is to abstain from meat, and to eat a full meal but once a day, during Lent; and is that so dangerous to health, or are we so weak and delicate, that we cannot endure it, and

are obliged to ask for a dispensation in the very first week of Lent, for fear that our health should suffer? Sheer imagination! "The excuse you allege is a temptation." We can do much, if we are only willing, if we have but a proper love for God, and for our eternal salvation.

Go through religious houses of men and women, and you will find many delicate youths and tender virgins who were brought up in luxury, shuddered at the very name of fasting, and could not bear to eat fish, as they then imagined. But ask them, now that they have followed the divine inspiration and embraced the religious state, ask them, I say, if they can fast and abstain from meat. Certainly, they can fast, and that, too, without much difficulty; nor, if they now and then get fish to eat, does it do them the least harm, while, in addition to the prescribed fasts, they, out of a holy zeal, impose on themselves frequently other more severe fasts, if they are allowed to do so by their superiors. And has their constitution or their bodily strength been changed since they entered religion? No; they are just as they were when they left the world. But one thing is changed in them. What is that? Their own will; for they have become more pious, more zealous in the divine service, than they formerly were in the world; and now they can fast, because they wish to fast; just as they would have been able to do it before, if they had only been willing.

Even they who were before too delicate to fast.

I cannot for the life of me understand how people allege their weak and delicate health as an excuse for not observing the general Lenten fast imposed on all Christians. Do they not condemn themselves by their conduct? For they have strength enough for other things, which are far more injurious to the health than abstinence from meat. Hear, my dear brethren, how beautifully and forcibly the Prophet Jeremias describes such people: "Their course is become evil, and their strength unlike."¹ Do you wish to know how their strength has become unlike? For instance, during Shrove-tide, or at some other time, you are invited to an evening party, at which you spend half the night eating, drinking, dancing, and otherwise amusing yourself; so that it is quite late when you go home. Before accepting the invitation, do you go to consult the doctor as to whether it is good for your health to appear at such a party? What an extraordinary question! you say. Why should I ask the doctor about such a thing? But are you not afraid of get-

They who say they are too weak to fast are strong enough often to do other difficult things.

¹ Factus est cursus eorum malus, et fortitudo eorum dissimilis.—Jerem. xxiii. 10.

ting ill, or of putting your head or stomach out of order, since you are so weak and delicate? Are you not afraid of injuring yourself by walking or driving through the cold air late at night, in wind and rain, sleet and snow, depriving yourself at the same time of your night's rest? No, you say; I can endure that easily enough, and find a pleasure in it. Well, if such is the case, you must have a strong constitution! To get up an hour earlier than usual in the morning, and go through the cold air, and suffer some discomfort for the purpose of assisting at some public devotion on week-days, or at a sermon on Sundays, that, I am well aware, is bad for the health, and is sure to affect the head and the lungs injuriously; but I thought it was just as bad when one went out to parties in similar circumstances. No, you answer; I have never found that to be the case. Truly, I see now that you must have a strong constitution indeed! And when you have spent four or five hours dancing, and go out of a warm room into the cold night air, and then into the warmth of your own house again, do you not find that affecting your health? No, not at all. Wonderful, indeed, must your constitution be! And when you eat or drink to excess, or fill your stomach with all kinds of fruit, sweetmeats, and sugarwater, when visitors arrive, are your head and stomach always in good order? Yes, I can bear all that without difficulty, nor does it make me the least ill. Certainly, you must be a very healthy person! For all doctors maintain that nothing is more injurious to the health than to eat and drink to excess, especially when different kinds of food and drink are used at the same time. And some have told me, too, that there is nothing more apt to cause colds and catarrhs, than the night air, and sudden changes from heat to cold, and from cold to heat. Let doctors say what they will, I have done it over and over again, and it has not hurt me. Then your constitution must be a very strong one!

But very weak where the law of God and the Church is concerned.

But tell me, is not this constitution of yours the same during Lent? How, then, is it that you were up to the present so strong and healthy that nothing could hurt you; whereas now you are so weak, that, if you abstain from meat for a time, you are sure to get sick? Ah, Christians, is it possible that one can endure anything without injuring one's health, when the laws of the world command, or the senses and desires of the flesh clamor for gratification, while, if there is question of obeying the law of God and the Church, all our strength is gone, the head is too weak, the stomach too delicate, we might grow sick and die?

Thus our strength has become unlike. Vitruvius relates a wonderful thing of a town in the island of Lesbos. He says that to-day you may see all the inhabitants full of health and strength, while to-morrow the whole town is like a hospital, so many of the people are sick, while the day after again they are as healthy as before, and so it goes on. What is the cause of this wonderful change. Nothing but the change of the wind. "When the south wind blows in that town," he says, "the people grow sick; when the north wind blows, they get well again."¹ Do we not find a nearly similar change taking place now, my dear brethren, amongst Christians? During Shrove-tide the weakest and most delicate are strong enough to spend the time in eating and drinking, in staying up late at night and amusing themselves in various ways; but as soon as the Lent comes on, then one has a head-ache, another has a weak chest, a third complains of his stomach, a fourth is subject to colds; one has this complaint, another that; no one is without some weakness or other. And when Easter arrives, they are all as well as ever. What is the reason of this change? It is due to a change of wind. We look to where the wind blows from. If from the north, that is, if the perverse spirit of the world wishes to have his vain customs observed, then all are strong and healthy; then neither wind nor weather, food nor drink, waking at night nor discomfort during the day, do any harm. But if the wind comes from the south, that is, if the Spirit of Jesus Christ urges us to take upon us His sweet yoke, alas, that I must say so, then every one is too weak and sickly. And so it is in reality, says St. Gregory: "all the lovers of the vain world are strong in earthly, but weak in heavenly things."² "Their strength is unlike;" they are strong when they please, and weak when they choose to be so, according to the wind. The law of fasting comes from the south, and does not please them, and therefore they say to themselves: I cannot fast, my stomach cannot bear fish; I must eat meat.

But what will their excuses avail before the all-seeing God, who cannot allow Himself to be deceived by any man, and who knows well what each one is able to bear? What will they avail before that Judge of whom the Prophet David says: "He shall judge the world with justice, and the people with His truth?"³ Mark these words, weak Christians; in His own divine truth He

Their excuse will not be admitted by God, and they will be all the more likely to lose their health.

¹ In qua civitate, Auster cum fiat, homines ægrotant; cum Septentrio, restituuntur ad sanitatem.—Vitruv. l. i., c. 6.

² Omnes hujus sæculi dilectores in terrenis rebus fortes sunt, in cœlestibus autem debiles.

³ Judicabit orbem terræ in æquitate, et populos in veritate sua.—Ps. xcvi. 13.

will judge the world, and not according to your idle imaginations. You violate the law of fasting by eating meat, in order to preserve your health, and to prolong your life; but do you not see how the devil betrays you, making your own self-love act as the traitor, when he inspires you with such ideas? Did not the wily serpent practise the same deceit with our first parents in Paradise? What did he say to Eve, in order to persuade her to eat the forbidden fruit? "No, you shall not die the death;"¹ you shall live as gods, if you eat of that fruit. But what happened to them? As soon as they had disobeyed His command, God announced to them that they should die: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust shalt thou return."² In the same way does the tempter act with us nowadays: "You shall not die the death," he exclaims; you must not expose yourself to the danger of dying before your time; fish is bad for your health; if you eat it, you will get sick and die; you must eat meat, in order to preserve your health and live longer. But take care lest, in punishment of your disobedience, God may deprive you of health and life together.

Shown by
an example.

The holy Bishop Elphege, of England, was once exhorting his people to observe the Lenten fast. When the sermon was over one of the congregation said: that preacher is too coarse and severe, (we are accustomed to similar compliments nowadays, too;) he has been shouting there loud enough, but he has not prepared my stomach for fasting; I cannot do without meat, or fast for such a long time. The Bishop was told of this; alas, said he, unhappy man! what will become of you even before to-morrow dawns. On the following day the man was found dead in his bed. This incident is related, by Baronius, as having occurred in the year 947. Oh, if we could always see the reason of the untimely death of those men or women who were so careful of their health, or the cause of their being always in ill health, how often would we not find that the very means they made use of to evade the law of fasting and to preserve their health and prolong their lives, was made use of by God in His just judgments to bring illness and death on them!

Exhortation
and resolution
to observe the

My dear Christians, unless evident necessity requires otherwise, let us strictly observe the law of God and of the Catholic Church; as, besides countless other good Christians, Cardinal

¹ Nequaquam morte moriemini.—Gen. iii. 4.

² In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane, donec revertaris in terram de qua sumptus es: quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris.—Ibid. 19.

Hosius did, who was papal nuncio in the Council of Trent. ^{Lenten fast strictly.} Wearied out by long journeys and many discomforts, he fell into an illness during Lent, but did not abate anything of the rigor of his fasting. His doctor, the other cardinals, and the bishops begged of him to give up fasting, lest he should injure his health. What? he said; God has commanded us to honor our father and mother that we may live long on earth; and therefore I, too, will honor my heavenly Father and my mother, the Church, and, like an obedient child, will observe the law of fasting, in the firm hope that I will thereby preserve my health and life better than if I took the most nourishing food. Ah, my God, I will also say, is it, then, possible that I should entrust my health and my life to the flesh of a dead animal, at a time when I am forbidden to use it as food, with more confidence than to Thee, the author and preserver of my life, so that I dread therefore to obey Thy law? No; in this, too, I will show that I am a good Christian; I leave the care of my health to Thy fatherly Providence. If self-love and sensuality try to persuade me that I cannot observe the general law of fasting, then I will make them the same answer that St. Augustine once made in another matter: "Why should I not do what these men and women have done?" So many Christians have kept the law of fasting for so many centuries, even when it was so strict that both fish and flesh were forbidden; why, then, should I not observe it, now that it is so easy? So many religious of both sexes can fast during the whole year almost; why should not I fast for forty days? At all events, Thou, O sovereign God, hast appointed the fast, and my mother, holy Church, has imposed it on her children; this should be enough to induce me to show myself publicly as her obedient child. And even if fasting should be somewhat more difficult to me than to others, who try to evade it by all sorts of vain pretexts, yet my soul and my spirit will have all the more consolation in Thee, and when the joyful season of Easter comes, I will be able to sing more heartily the glorious Alleluia. Amen.

On the way in which we are bound to fast, see the preceding Second Part.

FORTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY OF FASTING, IN ORDER TO DO PENANCE.

Subject.

We must fast, 1. because we must do penance; 2. because, of all penitential works, fasting is the chief, the most suitable, and the most convenient for all men.—*Preached on the second Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Apparuerunt illis Moyses et Elias cum eo loquentes.—Matt. xvii. 3.

“There appeared to them Moses and Elias talking with Him.”

Introduction.

Why did Christ, Our Saviour, make choice of Moses and Elias, instead of so many other holy patriarchs, as witnesses of His transfiguration and heavenly glory? St. Thomas of Aquin and St. John Chrysostom assign different reasons for it; the best for my purpose to-day is given by St. Jerome, who says: “Our Lord wished to have Moses and Elias with Him in His transfiguration, on account of their having united with Him in fasting.”¹ For Moses and the Prophet Elias were striking figures of our fasting Redeemer; like Him they fasted forty days and nights consecutively, and therefore He wished to have them with Him when He appeared in His glory, in order to show the world that they who fast are the most fitted for the glory of heaven. My dear brethren, we can and must observe the prescribed Lenten fast, and the excuses that are sometimes alleged to evade that law are generally but mere vain pretexts and suggested by sensuality. Such was the subject of my last sermon. Now I say, further,

Plan of Discourse.

If there were no law to bind us to fast, if a general dispensation from fasting were given to all of us, yet even then we should and must often fast. Why? Because we must necessarily do penance, as I shall show in the first part. But of all penitential

¹ Dominus noster ob jejuniorum consortia Moysen et Eliam transfiguratus in monte secum ostendit in gloria.

works fasting is the chief, the most suitable, and the most convenient for all men, as I shall show in the second part. How unjustifiable, then, is the conduct of those who, without urgent necessity, try to evade the law of fasting. Such will be the conclusion.

Again, for the consolation and encouragement of all Christians who fast as they ought, help us thereto with Thy grace, O Lord, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

He who has sinned grievously must do penance. Nor do I now allude merely to that penance which consists in detesting one's sins and confessing them with a firm purpose of never committing them again; for there is no doubt that the sacrament of penance is necessary to all who have grievously sinned, and who have the opportunity of receiving it; and that no one who has not the intention of doing penance in that way can be saved. Nor do I mean merely the penance that the priest imposes on us in confession, after we have told him our sins; for, generally speaking, it is so light, according to modern practice, that it scarcely deserves the name of penance. I speak now of that penitential spirit of which I have already treated at large, and which, according to many theologians, is a special virtue, distinct from other virtues, an act of justice, as St. Thomas calls it, by which the sinner restores to God what he owes Him, and voluntarily punishes himself for the evil he has done. For, by mortal sin, even if he commits but one in his whole life, man offers the greatest insult and injury to his God, whose infinite majesty and dignity he despises before the very eyes of God Himself, and whose commands he tramples under foot. This injury must be atoned for, although the guilt of the sin is remitted out of sheer generosity and mercy.

For, just as the virtue of gratitude requires that I should perform a service for him who has done good to me, if I have an opportunity, although I may have already thanked him in words, so, also, justice requires that I should try my best to please him whom I have offended, if I have a chance of doing so, although he may already have forgiven the offence. Now, he who commits a grievous sin gives to his corrupt flesh, which enjoys a forbidden pleasure, or to some other untamed appetite, which he has satisfied against the divine law, what he had no right to give it, and thus he has incurred eternal punishment.

He who has sinned grievously must do penance.

This is required by fairness and justice.

He must, therefore, be punished; vengeance must be inflicted on him for this disobedience; for God, when forgiving him, turned into a temporal punishment the eternal punishment his sin deserved, and that he has still to suffer. So that, just as a sovereign who generally allows his subjects to commit crime with impunity errs against justice, so, also, should I act against justice if I did not punish in myself what I have done wrong through disobedience, or if I tried to escape the punishment I deserve.

Either God must punish the sinner, or the sinner must punish himself.

This atonement offered to God for the injury done Him by sin, this vengeance and punishment inflicted on one's self, is the result of increasing one's ordinary good actions, or of voluntary penances, by which the flesh is chastised, the body made to feel pain, and sensuality mortified; unless, indeed, God Himself takes the rod in His hand, and by illness, or bodily pain, or other trials and troubles in this life, punishes the sinner for that disobedience which the latter would otherwise have to punish in himself. One or other of these two things must be done, says St. Gregory: either God must punish me, and I must accept the punishment willingly, acknowledging my guilt, or else I must perform works of penance according to the number of my sins, even if I were assured by a revelation that all my sins are forgiven. "I feared all my works," says holy Job, speaking to God, "knowing that Thou didst not spare the offender."¹ I have examined and diligently discussed all my works with secret dread, fearing to find in them something wrong. Why? Because I know that Thou didst not spare the offender, nor allow him who has sinned to go unpunished. But how could such a holy man speak in that way? Did he not know that the goodness and mercy of God are infinite, that He never rejects the repentant sinner, and that He rejoices with all His angels over one sinner who truly repents? "Yes," says St. Gregory, speaking of those words of Job, "God pardons the repentant sinner in so far that He receives him with joy again into His friendship, but He does not pardon him completely, so as to leave him altogether unpunished, because He does not permit sin to go unchastised, for, either the sinner inflicts punishment on himself, or God inflicts it on him."²

Even the holiest men must do

Adam, the first man and first sinner in the world, was pardoned by God for his disobedience, and yet was condemned

¹ Verebar omnia opera mea, sciens quod non parceres delinquenti.—Job ix. 28.

² Quia delictum sine ultione non desinit; aut enim ipse hoc homo in se penitens punit; aut hoc Deus cum homine vindicans percussit.—St. Greg. in c. ix. Job.

with Eve and all his descendants to hard work, to suffering, and to misery of all kinds, a punishment under which we, his children, still groan in this vale of tears. Moses, that great servant of God, was pardoned for the want of confidence he displayed in striking the rock twice to make the water flow from it; but nevertheless he was not allowed to enter the promised land, and had to die in sight of it, as a punishment of his fault. Mary, the sister of Moses, was pardoned for murmuring against her brother, but, as a punishment of her sin, she was smitten with a hideous leprosy and had to be separated from the rest of the people. King David was told by the Prophet Nathan, on the part of God, that his sins were forgiven, and yet, what persecutions and trials he had to endure by way of punishment. The pious and holy king Ezechias was pardoned for the vanity he displayed, in showing off and boasting about his treasures, but in punishment of his sin he was deprived of those very treasures. Magdalene and Peter were assured by the infallible Truth, Jesus Christ Himself, that their sins were forgiven, and yet their subsequent lives were most penitential.

But why do I speak of those who were sinners? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was holiness and innocence itself, had to live and die a penitent. The holy Fathers ask why it is that Our Lord, whose soul, from the first moment of His conception, enjoyed the beatific vision, did not also assume a glorious body, which certainly was due to His sacred humanity? What was the necessity for such a great and constant miracle, namely, that the happiness of the soul imparted no happiness to the body, and that nature had to her greatest amazement to see in the same Man the highest dignity and the deepest abasement, superabundant wealth and extreme poverty, perfect happiness and the greatest misery, heavenly joys and sorrow even to death? Why was that? "Ah," answers Origen, "Our Saviour came into the world as a willing victim to satisfy the divine justice for our sins, and as He assumed the figure and appearance of a sinner, it was not fitting for Him to live in pomp and magnificence, in honor and glory before the world, and to lead a life of comfort and pleasure, but as a penitent He had to endure punishment and trials, pains and torments, the cross and suffering. It was not becoming for Him to bear our sins in His glory." Weigh this well, my dear brethren; if Jesus Christ, the innocent Son of God, the Holy of Holies, who with even one sigh in a

penance for
their former
sins

Even Christ
Himself did
penance, as
a victim for
the sins of
others.

¹ Non decebat in gloria constitutum peccata nostra portare.

glorified body could have amply satisfied the justice of God for an infinite number of sins, if He spent His whole life in constant mortification of His body, because He had merely the figure and appearance of a sinner, which He voluntarily assumed in order to satisfy for the sins of others, how unjust and inconsistent it is for one who knows that he has committed grievous sins to lead a comfortable, easy life, and to avoid all bodily mortification. It remains true, then, that he who has sinned mortally, unless God Himself punishes him in this life, must necessarily do penance and punish himself.

We have all sinned.

But we have all been sinners, for who of us will dare to say that he has never sinned? If we had never done any evil whatever, original sin alone, in which we are conceived and born, would be a sufficient reason for doing penance all our lives. For it is in punishment for that sin that we are banished to this earth, this valley of tears, as the proper home of mortification and penance. How much more, then, are we not bound to do penance, when we consider the many actual sins we have committed in thought, word, deed, and omission, from the time when we first came to the use of reason? Is there one of us who can make an exception in favor of himself, and say, in the words of St. Paul: "For I am not conscious to myself of anything?"¹ I have never offended my God by sin! Alas, how few there are in the world who can say that! I am afraid that, if we look back on the past years of our lives, every day will supply us with new matter for penance and mortification; if we try to remember all the towns, villages, houses, rooms, gardens, streets, nay, even churches, we have been in during our lives, we shall hardly find a corner that will not reproach us with some deplorable transgression or other; if we go through the commandments of God and the laws of the Gospel, nearly every one of them will accuse us, and condemn our bodies as well as our souls; if we were to call to account the members of our bodies, our eyes, ears, tongues, mouth, and hands, hardly one of them would venture to declare itself innocent.

And must, therefore, all do penance.

Therefore we have all sufficient and superabundant reason for doing penance, in order to make some atonement for the injury we have offered our sovereign God, to punish our own wilfulness in committing so many sins, and to obtain the remission of the punishment still due to us. Let no one say or think: I have sinned, I acknowledge it; I have sinned often and grievously;

¹ Nihil enim mihi conscius sum.—I. Cor. iv. 4.

but I have long since repented, I have made a good confession, and I am firmly resolved never again during my whole life to offend God by mortal sin, while I will try to obtain remission of the punishment still due to my past sins, as well as of that which I deserve for my slight daily transgressions, by gaining indulgences, so that I do not stand in need of any special works of penance. Your conclusion does not hold good. You say that you have repented of and confessed your sins; and you have done perfectly right. You say that you are determined never to commit a mortal sin again; quite right, and it would be a great mistake for you not to make such a resolution. You try to gain the indulgences that are so liberally granted now by our holy mother the Church; a very wise thing, indeed, for thereby you can blot out a part, or, if the indulgence is plenary, the whole of the punishment still due to your sins. But by doing that you do only one part of what the virtue of penance requires of you; now, where is the other part? You must atone to God for the injury you have offered Him, and you must punish your own wilfulness; but you cannot do that by the mere purpose of not sinning again, or by gaining indulgences. It is by frequent mortification and voluntary penances, as St. Thomas of Aquin says, that you must fulfil this latter requirement of penance: "satisfaction must be made by penitential works."¹ But perhaps you do not know what penance you have to inflict on yourself? Then you can learn from this present holy season; fast, at least, by way of satisfaction for your sins, and fast strictly, as becomes a Christian, and as the law requires. For of all penitential works, fasting is the chief, the most suitable, and the most convenient for all men; as we shall see in the

Second Part.

Fasting is the chief penitential work, because, whenever the Holy Scripture exhorts the sinner to do penance, it almost always puts fasting in the first place. "Now, therefore, saith the Lord," by the Prophet Joel, "Be converted to Me with all your hearts." In what manner? "In fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning."² "Blow the trumpet in Sion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather together the people, sanctify the Church, assemble the ancients, gather together the little ones,"³

Fasting is the chief of all penitential works.

¹ Satisfactionem oportet fieri per opera poenalia.

² Nunc ergo dicit Dominus; convertimini ad me in toto corde vestro: in jejuniis, et in fletu, et in planctu.—Joel ii. 12.

³ Canite tuba in Sion, sanctificate jejunium, vocate coetum, congregare populum. . . . coadunate senes, congregare parvulos.—Ibid. 15, 16.

etc.; all without exception, old and young, great and small, must be converted to God. How? "In fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning." We read of many penitent sinners in the Holy Scriptures, but there was hardly one who did not have recourse to fasting and abstinence as the chief means of satisfying and atoning to God for his sins. "They proclaimed a fast, and put on sack-cloth from the greatest to the least,"¹ as did the penitent Ninivites. "They proclaimed a fast before the Lord to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that were come together out of the cities of Juda to Jerusalem;"² as did the penitent Israelites when the prophet Jeremias exhorted them to be converted from their wickedness. The same Israelites, when the Prophet Samuel converted them from idolatry, "fasted on that day, and they said there: We have sinned against the Lord."³ We read of Ahab in the Third Book of Kings, that, when he was humbled, "he put hair-cloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and slept in sack-cloth, and walked with his head cast down."⁴ The penitent king David says of himself: "I humbled my soul with fasting."⁵ "My knees are weakened through fasting, and my flesh is changed for oil."⁶ St. Paul makes the same confession of himself: "in hunger and thirst, in fastings often,"⁷ I have chastised my flesh along with other mortifications. Do you wish, says St. Ambrose, to know how to appease the God whom you have offended? "Then you must fast; for fasting is a sacrifice of reconciliation, that blots out sin altogether."⁸

The most
suitable.

Again, I have said that fasting is the most suitable of all penitential works. Why? "That they might know," answers the Holy Ghost, "that by what things a man sinneth, by the same also he is tormented."⁹ The son of a rich noble had dissipated all his fortune by extravagant living and immorality, and had incurred debts to such an extent that he was in hourly danger of being sent to prison. Some of his nearest relations petitioned

¹ Prædicaverunt jejunium, et vestiti sunt saccis, a majore usque ad minorem.—Jon. iii. 5.

² Prædicaverunt jejunium in conspectu Domini omni populo in Jerusalem, et universæ multitudini quæ confluxerat de civitatibus Juda in Jerusalem.—Jerem. xxxvi. 9.

³ Jejunaverunt in die illa atque dixerunt ibi: peccavimus Domino.—I. Kings vii. 6.

⁴ Operuit cilicio carnem suam, jejunavitque, et ambulavit demisso capite.—III. Kings xxi. 27.

⁵ Humiliabam in jejuniis animam meam.—Ps. xxxiv. 13.

⁶ Genua mea infirmata sunt a jejuniis, et caro mea immutata est propter oleum.—Ibid. cviii. 24.

⁷ In fame et siti, in jejuniis multis.—II. Cor. xi. 27.

⁸ Jejunate; jejunium enim reconciliationis sacrificium est, quod peccatum omnino delet.—St. Ambr. serm. 25.

⁹ Ut scirent quia per quæ peccat quis, per hæc et torquetur.—Wisd. xi. 17.

Alfonso, king of Aragon, to spare the young man's person, since he was not able to pay his debts. "What?" said the king; "if the worthless fellow has fallen into debt for the sake of his body, then his body, at least, shall pay for it." A clever and just answer. St. Paula of Rome, as St. Jerome tells us, pronounced the same judgment against herself; she used to scourge herself daily even to blood, and used most severe implements of penance, while she constantly shed tears of contrition. If any one advised her to mitigate the severity of her penances, she would answer, "the pleasures with which I formerly indulged my body must be paid for by those penances, and the laughing and amusements of my youth, by constant weeping." Now, my dear brethren, it was by gluttony that the first sin came into the world, and from that gluttony all our sins take their origin, so that no more suitable satisfaction can be offered for them than fasting and abstinence, which is contrary to gluttony. Such is the opinion of St. Athanasius: "as we are driven out of Paradise with Adam, our first father, by gluttony and disobedience, he who wishes to regain Paradise must do so by fasting and obedience."¹

Finally, amongst all works of penance, fasting is the most convenient for all kinds of people. How so? Because every one can make use of it, if he wishes; it costs no money, nor does one incur any expense by it; nay, a great deal of money, that would otherwise be spent on the pleasures of the table, is thereby saved. Nor does it cost any labor or trouble, for it consists merely in omission; do not touch the food for which you feel an inclination; eat less of it than is necessary to satisfy your hunger; that is all you have to do to fast. The poor and needy are well acquainted with fasting; for they often have nothing or not enough to satisfy their hunger fully. Weak and delicate people, too, find fasting easy; for they have, generally speaking, little appetite, and hardly strength enough to digest their food. The lower classes of citizens and laborers, who have to work hard to earn a living for themselves and their families, spend, so to speak, the greater parts of their lives in fasting and abstinence; for they have hardly anything to eat with their bread and water, unless, perhaps, a plate of vegetables cooked in fat. All these people may be quite at ease as far as the law of fasting is concerned; they fast and do penance enough, if they only offer up to God by a supernatural intention their poverty and want, their

And the most convenient for all.

¹ Ita rursus per jejunium et obedientiam in paradysum qui volet redibit.—St. Athan. l. de Virgin.

sickness and delicacy, their labor and toil, their bad and insufficient nourishment, and the other trials they have to endure daily, humbly acknowledging that they deserve such trials on account of their former sins, and that they now bear them by way of atonement. Ah yes, good people; think of this daily; see that you have God as your Friend by having a good conscience, and do not forget the good intention, if you wish your troubles to be profitable to you. There remain, then, only the rich and wealthy, who eat and drink well every day throughout the year, and that, too, without having any fatigue to undergo, since they need not work for their living; they spend their lives in ease and comfort, and are rather pleased that they have it in their power to do so. And what penance can we propose to such people as satisfaction for their sins? A hard mattress on which to take an uncomfortable sleep at night? Hair-shirts, iron chains, or girdles furnished with iron spikes, with which to chastise their flesh? Disciplines, to scourge themselves with? Yes, indeed! the very name of such things would make them shudder from head to foot. They would refuse to listen to any suggestion of the kind, and if any one ventured to make it to them, they would find some pretext or other to excuse themselves from adopting it; they would say that they have no opportunity of practising those penances, since they are never alone at home, and cannot be sure of the necessary privacy. So that for such people there is no more convenient means of mortification and penance than frequent fasting and abstinence; they have time and opportunity enough for that every day, if they wish.

Hence they are inexcusable who try to evade the law of fasting, and yet do no other penance.

From this I conclude, my dear brethren, that they whose only means almost of penance consists in fasting and abstinence are most inexcusable when they try by all kinds of pretexts and excuses, suggested by self-love and sensuality, to evade the general law of the Lenten fast, and do not observe it with strictness, according to Christian custom. Tell me, in God's name, you who refuse to fast as you ought, although all are bound to it under pain of sin, in what have your penances, that are necessary to all sinful mortals, hitherto consisted? Perhaps in frequent vigils and interruptions of your night's rest? Yes, I quite believe that you have often done something of the kind in pleasant company, at evening parties, at balls and dances, to say nothing of things that are still worse; but is that the way to do penance in order to satisfy God for the injuries you have

offered Him, to punish yourselves for your sins, and to blot out the chastisement due to them? If any one were to advise you to sacrifice a few hours of unnecessary sleep by an act of holy mortification, in order to be present at public morning devotions, to praise God with the assembled people, and thus to be encouraged to serve God with more zeal during the whole day, as even noble and illustrious personages are accustomed to do, to the great edification of all, oh, that would be too much, altogether, to expect from you; if you did that your heads would be heavy with sleep the whole day long, and you would not be able to attend to your business! No, you consider it penance enough if you get up in time for the eight o'clock sermon during winter, and it is not all of you that overcome yourselves even to that extent; and yet you refuse to observe the Lenten fast? In what, then, does your penance consist?

Have you ever tried those penances, I will not say those that were practised by the saints in the desert, and that have been and are practised now daily by religious of both sexes (for that would be too much for you altogether); but have you had any experience of those penances that people of the highest station, princes and princesses, kings and queens, emperors and empresses have practised in their courts? I read of Ferdinand II. and Charles V., the Roman emperor, that they often scourged themselves even to blood; have you ever done anything of the kind by way of penance? I read that Claude, duke of Lorraine, a celebrated hero, used to wear on his left arm an iron ring set with sharp spikes, and that he never left it off day or night, his object in so doing being to atone in some measure for the sins of his youth; have you ever done that? I read that the count of Lemos, a rich Spanish nobleman, had certain fixed days in the week on which he used to take a severe discipline, and this holy custom he adhered to so strictly, that, when on one of those days a wedding-feast was held in his house, he, remembering that it was a day of penance for him, withdrew quietly from the guests, shut himself up in one of the rooms of his castle, and, as he had not his usual discipline with him, tore the gold chain from his neck, and scourged himself with that; have you ever done anything of the kind? I read that the princess Catharine Fernandez, whenever she was compelled by her husband to appear in costly attire, used to punish herself for this worldly vanity, which she had to adopt against her will, by wearing a coarse hair-shirt under her garments; have you done

Although many illustrious personages have practised various penances.

anything of the kind? I read that Cornelia, a noble matron, when she had to go with her husband to a feast, used to put peas in her shoes, so that, while she was dancing and apparently enjoying herself, she experienced more pain than vain pleasure. Have you ever done anything of that kind in your nightly gatherings? I read that Margaret, the daughter of the king of Portugal and duchess of Parma, when in her last illness, gave to her confessor the hair-girdle she used to wear constantly, that he might take it away with him, so as to conceal the fact of her having worn it. The same was done by a rich noble in Rome, who on his death-bed gave to his confessor a box containing girdles of hair and copper, as well as iron chains and disciplines with which he was used to chastise his body. After the death of Eleonora, wife of the great emperor Leopold I., scourges and linen cloths stained with blood were found in her bed-room; for that innocent and holy empress used to practise the greatest austerities, as I have mentioned elsewhere, and as you may read in the panegyric that was preached at her funeral. Have you, I ask, ever thought of practising such mortifications? What sort of implements of penance will be found in your bed-rooms after your death? Costly silks and laces, gold rings, bracelets, and earrings, false hair, and a number of similar things that you use to gratify your vanity in dress, to catch the eyes of others, and to attract the notice of strangers. Perhaps, too, girdles may be found that you use, not to mortify yourselves, but to add to the idle pomp of your array. Are not those really the instruments of penance with which you try to gain the kingdom of heaven, that can be borne away only by the violent? I am not anxious to share in the reward that you will gain by such means! But, in God's name, what are you thinking of? You wonder and shudder at the austerities practised by those illustrious personages of whom I have just spoken. Alas, you exclaim, what lives they led! But with that empty sigh end all your attempts to imitate them. Yet you are not minded to do even as much penance as consists in observing the Lenten fast exactly!

They who do not even bear their daily trials with patience.

In what, then, does your penance consist? For you must confess that you have often offended the great God. Have you at least borne with patience, and as an atonement for your sins, those annoyances and trials that are common to all men, such as heat and cold, rain and wind, and the insults and trouble that others sometimes cause you? Have you endured all those things in the spirit of true penance, looking on them as a well-deserved

punishment of your sins, and saying, with Joseph's brethren in prison, when they remembered how unjustly they had acted towards their brother, "We deserve to suffer these things, because we have sinned against our brother,"¹ with justice do I suffer, because I have offended my God? Perhaps you have never even thought of that, but have regarded the least annoyance with displeasure, without a good intention, not directing it to God, nor to the profit of your souls; nay, you have murmured against it, and given way to cursing and imprecations on account of it, thus increasing the punishment due to your sins, while in other things, in eating, drinking, sleeping, resting, in dress and in entertainments, you have always sought your comfort and tried to gratify your sensuality. And yet you wish to evade the law of fasting? Yet you pretend you must eat flesh-meat, and have a full, or at least a half meal in the evening, lest you should have too much to suffer from the want of food, or cause discomfort to your body, or injury to your health? And where, then, I ask again, is your penance? Where the atonement to God for the injuries you have offered Him? Where the punishment of the disobedience with which you have revolted against your God, and perhaps often deserved the pains of hell? Are you not afraid, after a life of that kind, to appear before your Judge, who walked on the rude way of the Cross, amidst all kinds of penance and mortification, in order to show men how they must by violence enter the narrow gate of heaven? Do you, perhaps, wish to leave the punishment of your sins till the next life? Ah, woe to you, if so; for far more terrible instruments of penance and a more rigorous fast await you there! How will you be able to endure them, if you now find it so hard to fulfil the easy law of fasting?

No, O my God, I will not make such a foolish resolution. I acknowledge my guilt; for to no purpose would I seek to conceal anything from Thy all-seeing eye; I confess humbly that I have sinned; I have sinned often; I have sinned far too grievously, and hitherto I have not suffered the punishment I have deserved. Therefore I will do penance, by continually mortifying my flesh and its concupiscences, and by patiently bearing all the trials and crosses of this life; at all events, I will strictly observe the fast, as Thou hast commanded all Christians to do at this time under pain of sin. Let my sensual appetites cry out as they will, I will remember my sins and how I have de-

Conclusion
and resolution
to observe the
fast strictly.

¹ Merito hæc patimur, quia peccavimus in fratrem nostrum.—Gen. xlii. 21.

served to suffer perpetual hunger and thirst. And what a profitable exchange it will be for me to escape by such a slight penance the well-deserved and severe torments of the next life, and, as I hope and trust, to arrive by the way of penance at my heavenly country, where, according to Thy promise, I will be fed at Thy table for all eternity. Amen.

FORTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY OF FASTING IN ORDER TO AVOID SIN.

Subject.

If there were no law obliging us to fast, nay, if there were no more punishment due to our sins, we should still be all bound to fast, in order to be preserved from sin.—*Preached on the third Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Cum fortis armatus custodit atrium suum, in pace sunt ea quæ possidet.—Luke xi. 21.

“When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things are in peace which he possesseth.”

Introduction.

What a desirable thing it is to be able to keep one's possessions in peace! Not without reason do we cry out so often to heaven: “give, O Lord, peace in our days.” And certainly we have good cause for doing so; for the whole world, and especially this country of ours, knows by sad experience what terrible and general calamities arise from the disturbance of peace. Such is the object of the prayer that the Catholic Church so often addresses to God: “that Thou wouldst vouchsafe to grant peace and true concord to all Christian kings and princes, we beseech Thee, hear us,” Almighty God, who hast in Thy hands the hearts of all potentates. But, my dear brethren, we must also do our part. “When a strong man armed keepeth his court,” says our dear Lord, “those things are in peace which he possesseth.” What arms are we to use, besides prayer, in order to obtain this much desired peace? The very same arms that we must use to preserve our souls in peace with God and to keep

them from sin ; for it is a well-known axiom of the holy Fathers, that public calamities are never inflicted by God on a country, unless on account of the sins of the people ; so that, if sin is taken away, all other evils disappear with it ; if we are safe from sin, we can be sure that we shall be able to keep our possessions in peace. Fasting and abstinence, of which we have treated already during this holy season, are the chief, the most suitable, and the most convenient arms for this purpose, for all classes of men, as St. Bernard, with many others, teaches us. " Fasting," he says, " not only blots out past sins, but also preserves us from future sins." We have seen last Sunday that, if there were no law to oblige us to fast, yet we should all of us often fast, in order to make some atonement to God for the sins we have committed, and to avoid the punishment they deserve.

Plan of Discourse.

If there were no law obliging us to fast, nay, if there were no more punishment due to our sins, we should still be all bound to fast, in order to be preserved from sin and saved from the punishment due to it. Such is the subject of this exhortation. Let us all, then, at least observe as we ought the Lenten fast. Such shall be the conclusion.

With child-like confidence, O Lord and Author of peace, we address to Thee the prayer of the Church: " grant us the help of Thy grace, that, attending as we ought to fasting and prayer, we may be freed from our enemies of soul and body;" through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of the angels of peace.

When we consider all men on earth as they are in the sight of God, who makes no difference between men on account of their condition, we may divide them into two classes ; for they are either innocent and just, and have never offended God by deliberate sin ; or else they are transgressors, who must acknowledge themselves guilty of many a sin. Both these classes of men must in justice often fast and perform other good works of penance, if they wish to be free from sin for a long time, and to preserve peace and friendship with God. Such, it appears, is the force of those oft-repeated exhortations of those two chief preachers of penance in the Gospel, Jesus Christ and His holy precursor, John the Baptist. John went about everywhere preaching and crying out : " Do penance, for the kingdom of

The innocent as well as sinners are exhorted to fast.

¹ Jejunium non solum delet peccata præterita, sed et repellit futura.

heaven is at hand.”¹ Christ comes after him, and says: “Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish.”² Mark the difference, my dear brethren. The first exhorts men to penance by holding out to them the hope of reward, and reminding them of the future joys of heaven: the second urges them to penance by the terrible threat of eternal destruction. Their words were directed to the whole world: to the just and innocent, who are easily moved to do virtuous actions by hope and charity, and to wicked sinners, who must be violently urged thereto by fear. All must do penance: the just, that they may be preserved from evil, and may not begin to sin; the wicked, that they may cease from sin, or, if they are already converted, may not fall into sin again.

The innocent, on account of their frailty, that they may avoid sin.

With regard to the just and innocent, who are in the minority in the world amongst grown-up people, they stand in need of penance as a preservative against sin; for, no matter how innocent and holy they have hitherto been, how deeply grounded in the love of God, or how earnest their resolution never to offend Him, yet they are still but human, that is, weak and frail creatures, apt to change at any moment, as St. Paul says, and they require the greatest care to preserve the costly treasure of divine grace. In this sense we may well understand the words that the Church addresses to her faithful children at the beginning of the forty day's fast of Lent: “remember, man, thou art dust.”³ As if she wished to say, take care, O mortal, and be on your guard; for, although you may have been hitherto immovable and strong as a pillar in the house and service of God, yet remember you are but dust, that the first wind can easily blow away; therefore strengthen yourself with the weapons of the spirit, and chastise your body by fasting and penance. Nor should it require much to convince us of the inconsistency and deplorable weakness and frailty to which even the most innocent are subject; we all of us know enough about that from our own sad experience.

Their frailty comes from the violation of fasting of which our forefather Adam was guilty.

It comes from the first violation of the law of fasting of which our first parents were guilty in paradise. For, from the time when human reason raised itself up in rebellion against God, the flesh, with its concupiscences and inordinate appetites, rebels against sound reason, and to such an extent, that the understanding is darkened in supernatural things, our freedom is

¹ *Pœnitentiam agite; appropinquavit enim regnum cœlorum.*—Matt. iii. 2.

² *Nisi pœnitentiam habueritis, omnes similiter peribitis.*—Luke xiii. 3.

³ *Memento, homo, quia pulvis es.*

considerably weakened, our inclinations tend to evil, while the will is sluggish to good, so that it is only with a great effort that it can be urged to good, or kept away from evil. And no matter how thoroughly the guilt of original sin is washed away by the waters of holy baptism, yet concupiscence, which theologians call "the source of sin,"¹ still retains possession, and from it come all temptations, since the devil makes use of our own flesh and its desires as instruments and helpers to drag the soul into sin. All this is described in a few words, by the apostle St. James, in his Epistle: "From whence are wars and contentions among you," which you daily experience in yourselves? "Are they not hence, from your concupiscences, which war in your members?"² Therefore you need not go far to find the cause of the strife; you have it within yourselves.

Now, the more liberty is allowed to the flesh and its desires, the more it is permitted to enjoy itself, even in things that are otherwise lawful, the more delicately it is nourished, the more obstinate will it become in its rebellion against the spirit, and the more difficult will it be for sound reason to rule it and to keep it within the bounds of God's commandments. It resembles a restive horse, that, when it is kept a long time in the stable well fed, can be tamed afterwards only with great difficulty. Not without reason is that source of sin in our flesh called, "the fire of concupiscence."³ The more wood you put on a fire, the greater the heat, and the higher the flame; pour oil on it, and you will have great difficulty in preventing the whole house from catching fire. To pamper the body, to eat, drink, and sleep according to our desires, is nothing else than to add fuel to the fire of concupiscence and to pour oil on the flame, as St. Jerome says. "And again, 'a full stomach is an incentive to lust.'" St. Ambrose speaks in a similar way: "Lust is fed by feasting and nourished by pleasure, it is kindled by wine and inflamed by drunkenness."⁴ This fire, then, must often be kept under, even by the innocent and the just, or else it will break out into a flame that is most dangerous to the soul; this restive horse must frequently be tamed and punished, if he

It is increased by indulging the flesh too much.

¹ Fomes peccati.

² Unde bella et lites in vobis? Nonne hinc? Ex concupiscentiis vestris, quæ militant in membris vestris?—James iv. 1.

³ Ignis concupiscentiæ.

⁴ Cum cibo abundantî carnem reficimus; oleum igni affundimus, ut majores effundat flammæ.

⁵ Ventris saturitas seminarium libidinis est.

⁶ Pascitur libido conviviis, nutritur deliciis, vino accenditur, ebrietate inflammatur.

is to remain obedient to his master, the spirit, to be subject to reason.

Fasting
is the best
way of tam-
ing the
flesh.

How is that to be effected? Amongst the many works of penance, answers St. Gregory, that can be used for that purpose, the most suitable, the safest and the most powerful is that prescribed to us by the Catholic Church, namely, fasting, and frequent abstinence from food and drink: "The Church forbids the use of flesh-meat during Lent, that our flesh may be subject to the spirit, and our appetites to reason."¹ St. Thomas of Aquin agrees with him: "the chief object of fasting is to subdue the desires of the flesh, for chastity is preserved by fasting."² St. Ambrose expresses the same idea in the beautiful words that priests read at Prime in the divine Office: "may abstemiousness in eating and drinking subdue the pride of the flesh."³ What is meant by the pride of the flesh? Is not pride a vice of the spirit and the mind alone? How, then, can it be ascribed to the flesh? With very good reason, my dear brethren, for is it not pride for the subject to command his sovereign? the servant, his master? the maid, her mistress? Now what is our flesh? A miserable creature, of vile origin, made of a lump of earth at first, and given over to the reasoning soul to be its servant. Yet we learn by daily experience that the flesh arrogates a right over the soul, and frequently importunes it to consent to its wanton desires; nay, it often causes the reasoning soul to obey its sensuality. Is not that an intolerable pride? And what arms shall we take up to tame it? Fasting, abstinence, abstemiousness in eating, can and must subdue this pride and wilfulness of the flesh.

Without
fasting one
is easily
overcome
by the
flesh.

Naturalists tell us that when the elephant and the dragon meet, they invariably fight; if the elephant is fasting and hungry he easily overcomes the dragon; but if he has had a full meal the dragon overcomes him. A striking picture, my dear brethren, of what happened to our forefather Adam in paradise, and of what his unhappy children, who have inherited his corrupt nature, so often experience. As long as Adam was fasting, and while he observed the abstinence imposed on him by God, he remained a beloved friend of God, but when he followed his inordinate appetites by eating the forbidden fruit, he became a

¹ Ideo carnum esum interdictum tempore jejunii, ut ea ratione frænetur caro et subjiciatur spiritui, ac rationi pareat appetitus.—St. Greg. Ep. ad Augustin., ep. Angliæ.

² Assumitur jejunium principaliter ad concupiscentias carnis reprimendas, quia per jejunium castitas conservatur.—St. Thom., II., 2, q. 147, a. 1.

³ Carnis terat superbiam potus cibique parcitas.

slave of the devil. "While he was fasting," says St. Jerome, "he was in Paradise, but hardly had he eaten, when he was cast forth." "Therefore," says St. Ambrose, "no better means of defence can be found, than fasting, against the attacks of the hellish serpent." St. Augustine, commenting on the words of Christ to His disciples, explaining to them why they could not cast out a certain kind of devil, "This kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting," "See," he says, "how powerful fasting is; it can do what was impossible to the apostles."

This is the reason why even the most innocent and holy friends of God, such as Antony, Hilarion, Benedict, Bernard, Ambrose, Charles Borromeo, Francis, Teresa, Catherine of Siena, Aloysius, and countless others, fasted so rigorously. According to the testimony of Athanasius, Antony fasted so strictly during his whole life, that sometimes he neither ate nor drank for two or three days together, and then, on the fourth day, took only a small piece of bread. While Hilarion was still a young man of fifteen, he fasted just as strictly; he never ate till sundown, and then nothing but a few dried figs; nay, he often went four whole days without food or drink of any kind, so that he was sometimes hardly able to breathe, through hunger and exhaustion. St. Ambrose, as bishop, was for many years accustomed to eat but once a day, and then very little. The holy cardinal, Charles Borromeo, although he was delicately nurtured, always abstained from meat, fish, eggs, and wine; and during the last years of his life he used to take nothing but dry bread and water. Aloysius, who, as I have told you before, was more like an angel than a human being in innocence, used to weigh his food most accurately every day, lest he should give his body more nourishment than was necessary to preserve its life for the service of God. In a word, says St. Cyprian, "among all who were remarkable for sanctity, we read of none who attained it without fasting." Let no one imagine that those saints fasted so rigorously merely in order to serve God more perfectly, and to gain more glory in heaven. Truly, that was one reason why they did it, but there was another, besides; they looked on fasting as necessary, for, like other poor mortals,

Even innocent saints have done that.

¹ Quamdiu jejunavit, in paradiso fuit; comedit, et ejectus est.

² Nullum remedium majus contra inimicum serpentem poteris invenire, quam jejunium.

³ Hoc autem genus non ejicitur nisi per orationem et jejunium.—Matt. xvii. 20.

⁴ Videte, charissimi, quanta sit jejunii virtus, ut id facere jejunium valeat, quod Apostoli nequiverunt.—St. Aug., Serm. 65 de temp.

⁵ Quotquot viros virtutum vidimus, sine jejunio non legimus ascendisse.

they had to groan and sigh under the slavery of their corrupt flesh, and so they considered themselves bound to call in the help of penance, and especially of fasting, in order to tame the wanton desires of the flesh and make it submit to reason, lest, if it overcame them, they should lose their innocence and holiness. They knew very well, with St. Bernard, that "no one can overcome temptations to impurity if he does not chastise his body by fasting and abstinence."¹ They knew well that, in order to preserve sanctifying grace in their souls, and to keep them free from sin and in the friendship of God, they required a special, powerful, helping grace from God, and they acknowledged with St. Augustine, that, as long as they continued to do penance, so long would they receive the help of this grace.*

Therefore they who lead luxurious lives are in a dangerous state.

How much attention is paid to this by those who, although they do not seem to be addicted to any gross vices, yet pamper their bodies, seek their comfort in all things, gratify their sensuality by eating and drinking as they please, and, besides, when Lent comes on, bring forward all kinds of empty pretexts, to excuse themselves from observing the fast? And by those who do not wish to hear a word about Christian mortification and crucifying the flesh, to which St. Paul and Our Lord Himself so frequently exhort all men, but lead idle, luxurious lives from one year's end to the other, and are, generally speaking, among the first to use the dispensation for eating meat during Lent, if one is granted (I do not say that this is unlawful for them; for I freely acknowledge that, when the dispensation is conceded to a town or district, they commit no sin by using it), or otherwise to do their best to evade the Christian law? If they happen to fast until evening, abstaining from all kinds of food and drink, on Good Friday, according to what I acknowledge to be a laudable custom, they think they have done wonders in the service of God, and that He, whom they have offended, must be satisfied with that amount of mortification from them during the whole year. Under such circumstances, indulging their bodies in everything as they do, how can they reasonably expect always to keep free from other sins, to which the wanton and unmortified flesh is sure to tempt them?

Shown by the parable of the rich glutton.

St. Luke describes, in a few words, the eternal ruin of the rich glutton: "And the rich man also died; and he was buried in hell."² Why? What wrong had he done? Was he, perhaps,

¹ Tentationes vincere non poteris, nisi carnem per abstinentioniam castigaveris.

² Tamdiu enim gaudet et sustentatur a gratia, quamdiu sustentatur a poenitentia.

* Mortuus est autem et dives, et sepultus est in inferno.—Luke xvi. 22.

guilty of idolatry, so that he refused to adore the true God, and bent the knee before gods of wood and stone? Or did he commit a sacrilege by profaning and robbing the temple? Was he a revengeful man, who persecuted, wounded, or even killed his enemy? Was he an adulterer, addicted to the brutish vice of impurity? Was he a thief, who had got possession unjustly of the property of others? No; we read nothing of the kind in the Gospel. And in what, then, did his guilt consist? Hear the reason on account of which the divine and all-just Judge condemned him: "he was clothed in purple and fine linen; and feasted sumptuously every day."¹ That was all, and it was enough to condemn him in the next life to eternal torments, as we see from the answer that Abraham made to his complaints in the midst of his intolerable sufferings: "Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime."² Remember what an easy life you had, and therefore "thou art tormented."³ But, you will ask, what is the harm in being well-dressed, in eating and drinking well every day, and enjoying one's self lawfully? That is the usual mode of life of those who can afford to live in that way. I can and will not say anything certain of the mode of life common in the world; but the Holy Ghost tells me, by the wise Ecclesiasticus, "Go not after thy lusts; but turn away from thy own will;" for, "if thou give to thy soul her desires, she will make thee a joy to thy enemies."⁴ If you make a rule of doing and enjoying everything that is lawful and agreeable, you will not be long without doing something that is unlawful and forbidden, until at last you will enter on the broad and pleasant way that leads to destruction.

Therefore, just Christians, no matter how innocent you are, if you wish to preserve yourselves free from sin, and to be able to conquer temptation, you must often call in to your help the mortification of the flesh, and especially frequent fasting and abstinence from food and drink. What does a gardener do to preserve the good seed he has planted from being eaten up by the birds? He covers the earth with sharp thorns to keep the birds away. And that was what the penitent David did, in order to preserve his soul from the attacks of the hellish birds of prey: "I covered my soul in fasting,"⁵ an example we

The innocent, too, must fast. Shown by an example.

¹ Induebatur purpura et bysso, epulabatur quotidie splendide.—Luke xvi. 19.

² Fili, recordare quia recepisti bona in vita tua.—Ibid. 25.

³ Tu vero cruciaris.—Ibid.

⁴ Post concupiscentias tuas non eas, et a voluntate tua avertere. Si præstes animæ tuæ concupiscentias ejus, faciet te in gaudium inimicis tuis.—Ecclesi. xviii. 30, 31.

⁵ Operui in jejuniis animam meam.—Ps. lxxviii. 11.

should do well to follow. "Oh, what a beautiful mantle that is," says St. Ambrose, speaking of these words; beautiful is the cloak that covers the soul, so that the tempter cannot attack it: "he who does not fast is naked and unprotected, and is exposed to the danger of being wounded."¹ Ruffinus tells us that there was once a young religious who complained bitterly to an old member of his Order that his life was intolerable to him. What shall I do, Father? said he. I cannot stand it any longer; I am plagued day and night by impure thoughts and horrible desires. Tell me what to do. What thoughts do you speak of? asked the old man. I know nothing of them, nor do I remember ever having been troubled with them. What? cried out the young man, astonished; how is it possible that there is a single individual in the whole world who is not now and then assailed by such thoughts? I will tell you, answered the other; from the time that I entered the religious life I have never eaten enough bread to satisfy my hunger, nor drunk enough water to quench my thirst, nor slept enough to rest the body completely; so that, as my stomach is always clamoring for food and drink, and my wearied body for rest, I have no time to think of impure objects, and the desires of the flesh give me no particular trouble. The young man went off, quite consoled by this advice, and firmly determined to adopt the same plan in order to conquer temptation. So true are the words of St. Ambrose, "hunger is a friend of purity, an enemy of lust; while satiety ruins chastity and nourishes concupiscence."²

How much more, then, should not those who have been sinners fast.

I have spent too long, my dear brethren, talking of the innocent and just; yet, from what I have said, it is clear that they who have been sinners and have been addicted to many vices during their lives must often have recourse to fasting and abstinence in the matter of food and drink, although they have already satisfied God for their sins. For, if an innocent man, who never tasted a forbidden pleasure, nor transgressed the law of God to gratify his evil inclinations and carnal desires, must still fast and do penance, in order to avoid sin and overcome temptation, how much more necessary must not fasting be to him who has sinned grievously, and who, on account of his former bad habits, is much more inclined to sin? For, just as in baptism,

¹ Bonum animi operimentum, quod animam tegit, ne a tentatore deprehendatur: qui non jejunat, nudus et infectus est, patet vulneri.

² Fames amica est virginitati, inimica lasciviae; saturitas vero prodigit castitatem, nutrit illecebram.—St. Ambr. serm. de quadrag.

although the soul is cleansed from the stain of original sin, yet the flesh still remains rebellious against the spirit, so, also, after having received the sacrament of penance, although the stain of guilt is removed from the soul, yet, in addition to the punishment that still remains to be suffered, there are two other terrible effects of sin, which do not disappear, and which are called by the Council of Trent, "the relics of sin."¹

The first is a certain facility and audacity, setting shame at defiance, in repeating one's former sins, as all sinners know by experience. What fear and dread you experienced, O man, how hard it seemed to you, and what a great struggle took place in your heart, the first time you made up your mind to offend God by mortal sin! The very name of mortal sin caused you to shudder, and was enough to keep you from committing it. But after you had consented a few times to sin, did you not find that shame and dread disappearing either completely, or at least in proportion to the gravity and number of your sins? The other effect consists in the rebellion and disobedience of the carnal appetites, which become more headstrong and obstinate in proportion to the amount of indulgence conceded them, so that the spirit is weakened and is less able to control them. Hence it happens that one falls so easily and at the first temptation into his former abominations, and comes to confession with nearly the same sins each time, unless he is particularly careful and does violence to himself constantly. A converted sinner is like a convalescent patient, who is recovering from an attack of fever; he does not suffer so much as before, but for a long time he feels a weakness and lassitude in his limbs, and if he is not careful of what he eats and drinks, and does not observe the laws of temperance, he runs a great risk of falling into his former illness again. Oh, what manifold mortifications such a person is obliged to practise! How often is he not compelled to abstain from food for which his mouth waters! How often must he not, against his will, stand up from the table without having fully satisfied his hunger! And if he refuses to do so, he is at once reproved by those around him; if you go on like that, they say, you will see how it will end with you. Why, O Christians, are people so careful of the health of the body, while they do so little to keep the precious soul from relapsing into its former maladies? If we can fast and abstain with great self-denial from food of which we are very fond, for the sake of the body, should we not be

On account
of the relics
of sin.

¹ Reliquias peccati.

much more willing to fast and to overcome ourselves for the sake of the immortal soul?

Which cannot be eradicated without fasting.

For that is the way in which to destroy little by little those relics of sin, and it is prescribed to penitents by the Council of Trent as a most efficacious means to that end.¹ Of fasting in particular, St. Augustine says: "Fasting cleanses the mind, subjects the flesh to the spirit, scatters the clouds of concupiscence, extinguishes the flames of lust, etc."² What a great mistake they then make, who, when they have got rid of the heavy burden of their sins at Easter, think and say, thank God, that much is done; I am free from that burden; I have confessed all my sins, and performed my penance. And then they persuade themselves that they can enjoy themselves as before, and live as if they had never done any wrong. No; you must know that you have not done enough for your soul. If you have had true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment, and have candidly declared your sins in confession, the unclean spirit is certainly driven out of you; the house is swept and garnished; but be careful; for what did you hear in to-day's Gospel? "I will return," says the unclean spirit who is gone out of man, "I will return into my house whence I came out. Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and entering in they dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."

As we learn from the example of penitents.

St. Nilus had committed but one sin in his youth; and, in order to prevent a relapse, and to keep away the unclean spirit, he imposed on himself a most rigorous fast during his whole life; he used to eat nothing but vegetables and fruit; water was his only drink; he slept on the bare earth, and thus preserved the health of his body as well as that of the soul for ninety-five years. And can one who has sinned so often, who has so often laid aside the burden of his guilt in confession, and come again to confession with the same sins, can he reasonably hope that, amid the countless dangers and occasions to which he is exposed in an easy, comfortable life, pampering his body in every way, eating and drinking as he pleases, he will be always able to withstand temptation? St. John Chrysostom, considering the words of St. Paul, "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection; lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should be-

¹ Medentur peccatorum reliquiis, et vitiosos habitus tollunt.

² Jejunium purgat mentem, carnem spiritui subiecit, concupiscentiæ nebulas dispergit, libidinum ardores extinguit, etc.

come a cast-away”¹ (and according to St. Jerome and St. Ambrose that chastising of the body consisted principally in fasting and abstinence), considering these words, St. Chrysostom cries out with a deep sigh: “If Paul was so much afraid of sin and reprobation,” although he had so often bewailed and done penance for the sins of his life, and had labored more than the other Apostles for the honor of Jesus Christ; although he had converted so many souls by his preaching, and had become, as it were, an angel; but in spite of that, he still thought it necessary to chastise his body by fasting, alas, “what have we to say for ourselves?”² What ought not we to do, in order to avoid sin and eternal damnation! Do we still venture to say, I cannot fast; I must have meat; I must have a full meal in the evening, or else I shall become too weak; I shall not be able to sleep, and my health will suffer?

Away with those deceits and false excuses of sensuality! The health of my soul should certainly be more dear to me than the welfare of my mortal body; and if I cannot preserve it unless I chastise the body by fasting, abstinence, and works of penance, then I am fully determined that the body must suffer. Far be it from me to make use of any pretext whatever to evade the general law of the Lenten fast, that is imposed on all Christians, especially in the present, troublous times, when we should in any case try to appease the anger of God by penance and mortification, that He may avert from us the public calamities that threaten us. No; I will fast strictly; and not only will I deprive the stomach of flesh-meat, but my whole body shall have its share of mortification. My eyes, my ears, my tongue, my hands shall fast, that they may neither see, hear, say, nor touch what might be even a remote danger or occasion of sin to them, so that, being thus always armed against my enemy, I shall be able to keep my soul and its salvation in peace, and help to bring peace and prosperity to our dear native land. Amen.

Conclusion
and resolution
to keep
the law of
fasting.

¹ Castigo corpus meum, et in servitutem redigo, ne forte, cum aliis prædicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar.—I. Cor. ix. 27.

² Si autem Paulus hoc timuit, postquam prædicavit, et factus est angelus: quid nos æixerimus?

FORTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY OF ALMS-GIVING FOR THE SAME END.

Subject.

For the same purpose for which we must fast it is also necessary to give alms, whether we consider the past or the future.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday of Lent.*

Text.

Unde ememus panes ut manducent hi?—John vi. 5.

“Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?”

Introduction.

Ah, if only all who have the means were so merciful and charitable that, with Jesus Christ, our dear Saviour, they would often open their coffers, and take counsel with each other in the same words that I have quoted, “Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?” Husband, wife, whence shall we buy bread to feed the poor and needy in our neighborhood? If, I say, all who could afford it were thus merciful and charitable, there would not be so many decent poor crying out: alas, where can we buy bread that we and our children may eat? My dear brethren, we have hitherto treated of the law, the obligation, and the necessity of fasting. But, good and salutary as fasting is in itself, yet the Catholic Church does not command her children to fast merely that they may abstain from meat and eat a full meal but once a day. For, amongst other reasons, the Lenten fast is imposed, according to the teaching of the holy Fathers, “that what the stomach is deprived of may be given to the poor;”¹ and while the stomach is fasting from its ordinary food, the hand may busy itself in generosity to the needy. Hence, according to some doctors, they who are blessed by God with wealth are not less obliged to perform the corporal works of Christian charity during Lent, than those who are in good health and strength are bound to do works of penance; nay, they say that there is no use in fatiguing the body by depriving it of food, unless at the same time the members of Jesus Christ, that is, the poor, are fed and nourished by alms-deeds. Ah, dear Lord, if the world and all it contains were mine, Thou knowest how

¹ Ut detur pauperi, quod subtrahitur ventri.

willingly I would give it all to Thee in the persons of Thy poor; do Thou now place the words on my tongue and give them the strength of Thy grace, through the Mother of Mercy and the help of our holy guardian angels, that that Christian charity and generosity, which I am not in a state to practise, may at least be aroused in the hearts of others. Relying on Thy help and grace, I say:

Plan of Discourse.

Besides fasting we must also give alms according to our means; for alms-giving is required for the very same purpose for which we must fast. Such is the whole subject of this exhortation. It is required as far as our past lives are concerned, as we shall see in the first part. It is required as far as our future lives are concerned, as we shall see in the second part.

As far as our past lives are concerned, we should and must often fast, in order to atone for our past sins and to satisfy the justice of God for them; and as far as our future lives are concerned, in order to subdue the inordinate desires of the flesh, and to receive the help of God's grace, that we may avoid sin and eternal damnation. These two objects form the chief end of fasting and bodily mortification, as I have shown on former occasions. But they also are the reason why alms-giving should always accompany fasting. For, with regard to the first object, it is certain, as De Lyra says, that of all penitential works none is more efficacious in appeasing the anger of God and obtaining a remission of the punishment that still remains due to our sins, than alms-giving and generosity to the poor and needy.¹

Alms-giving satisfies for the punishment due to sin.

Nor does this truth stand in need of a long proof, for it is emphatically and expressly declared in the Holy Scripture by God Himself, so that to doubt it would be to call in question the very word of God. "Charity covereth all sins,"² says the Holy Ghost by the Wise Man, no matter what they are, or how great be their number. "Before all things," as St. Peter says in his First Epistle, "have a constant mutual charity amongst yourselves." Why? "for charity covereth a multitude of sins,"³ so that, as St. Thomas of Aquin says, even the most grievous sins, when covered by works of charity and mercy, are, as it were, not considered by God, who will take no notice of them, nor punish

Proved from Scripture.

¹ Est enim eleemosyna virtus inter omnia opera poenalia maxime satisfactoria.

² Universa delicta operit caritas.—Prov. x. 12.

³ Ante omnia autem mutuam in vobismetipsis charitatem continuam habentes; quia charitas operit multitudinem peccatorum.—1. Pet. iv. 8.

them.¹ The elder Tobias, when exhorting his son, recommended him specially to practise charity towards the poor and needy: "For alms deliver from all sin and death."² The same was afterwards affirmed by the archangel Raphael: "For alms delivereth from death, and the same is that which purgeth away sins, and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting."³ "Give alms," says Christ Himself to the wicked Scribes and Pharisees; "and behold all things are clean unto you."⁴

Confirmed
from the
Fathers.

The holy bishop St. Ambrose, considering those words of the wise Ecclesiasticus, "Water quencheth a flaming fire, and alms resisteth sins;"⁵ compares alms-giving with the sacrament of baptism, and says, alms-giving blots out sin, just as baptism extinguishes the fire of hell. Oh, what a good and gracious God we have, he continues; how many powerful means He has supplied us with to enable us to save our souls easily! He has instituted the sacrament of baptism, that not only blots out the guilt, but also takes away all the punishment due to all the sins that one has committed. But if a poor, weak mortal offends God grievously after baptism, and thus again deserves the eternal torments of hell, behold, he has two other means at hand to free himself from sin; the one is the sacrament of penance, which takes away the guilt of sin, and the other is alms-giving, which remits the punishment due to it. So far St. Ambrose.

Anything
can be done
with men
by bribery.

The reason of all this is evident, my dear brethren. Experience teaches that with money, presents, and bribes one can do anything with others; the bitterest enemies can be reconciled and made good friends, and the greatest injustice can in a short time be rectified. Plutarch relates that Philip, king of Macedon, once gave a large sum of money to a man who was accused of having spoken ill of him; and the effect of his liberality was to make his former calumniator henceforth speak of him always in the highest terms of praise. "See," said Philip, "it is in my power to cause my detractors to sound forth my praises."⁶ The same Philip was on another occasion attacking a certain fortress, when his scouts advised him to desist from the attack, as the place was so well situated, on a steep rock, that it was impossible to take it by assault. "Is the place, then, so steep," asked Philip, "that

¹ Ne scilicet appareant ad puniendum.

² Quoniam eleemosyna ab omni peccato et a morte liberat.—Tobias iv. 11.

³ Quoniam eleemosyna a morte liberat, et ipsa est quas purgat peccata, et facit invenire misericordiam et vitam æternam.—Ibid. xii. 9.

⁴ Date eleemosynam, et ecce omnia munda sunt vobis.—Luke xi. 41.

⁵ Ignem ardentem extinguit aqua, et eleemosyna resistit peccatis.—Ecclesi. iii. 33.

⁶ En in manu mea est facere ut detractores sint laudatores.

not even a laden mule could climb up to it?" "Oh, certainly," answered the other, "there is no doubt that a mule could reach it." "Then," replied Philip, "it is easy of access, and it can be taken."¹ He thereupon sent a mule laden with gold to the commandant of the fortress, and the latter, blinded by the money, left the place with his army, so that Philip took it without the loss of a single man. Similar effects are worked daily still amongst men by bribes, presents, and money. Hence, in the Old Law, God gave this command to judges: "Thou shalt not accept person nor gifts." And He immediately adds the reason: "for gifts blind the eyes of the wise, and change the words of the just."² No matter how pious and just a judge may be, if he accepts a bribe, then good-bye to his justice; his eyes are blinded to the guilt of a criminal; his ears are closed, so that he cannot hear any accusation against him; his hands are tied, and he cannot punish the malefactor as he deserves; his mouth is shut, and cannot pronounce a just sentence. Alas, this is but too true!

Now, what do I mean by all this, my dear brethren? Dare we, then, venture to help our case before the divine tribunal with money and presents, so as to gain something to which we have no right? Not a doubt of it. St. John Chrysostom gives an apposite answer, and cries out in astonishment: "O wonderful power of alms-giving. It creeps into the divine tribunal, and there enables us to meet our Judge without fear."³ For Jesus Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead, stretches forth His hand whenever we give anything to the poor in His name; He it is who takes the bread, the money, or whatever other gift we bestow, as we know from His own lips: "As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me."⁴ Thus He allows Himself to be bribed by the sinner, so that He has no eyes to see his sins, in order to punish them; no tongue to pronounce against him the sentence of eternal death; no hands to inflict on him the chastisement he so well deserves; and the alms He has received converts Him from a bitter enemy into a dear friend of the sinner. "Give alms and behold all things are clean unto you;" you will thereby make up for everything.

And even
with God, by
alms-giv-
ing.

¹ Ergo accessu et expugnatu facilis est.

² Non accipies personam nec munera; quia munera excecant oculos sapientum, et mutant verba justorum.—Deut. xvi. 19.

³ O singularem eleemosynæ vim! Sola ad divinum tribunal irrepit, ne Judicem timeamus.

⁴ Quamdiu fecistis uni ex his fratribus meis minimis, mihi fecistis.—Matt. xxv. 40.

As David
and others
experi-
enced.

That was the way in which David tried to make good his cause with the God whom he had offended, as he says himself: "I will wash my hands among the innocent."¹ But David, what are you thinking of? Will you wash among the innocent those hands that are stained with the filth of adultery, and with the blood of Urias? Will you cleanse them so that they will resemble the soul of an innocent man? Yes; so clean will I wash them. In what manner will you do it? By giving generous alms to the poor; such is the answer that the learned Hugo gives in the person of David, commenting on this text: "I will wash my hands among the innocent; that is, I will cleanse my works from the stain of sin, in the laver of alms-giving."² In the same way, too, the otherwise impious emperor Zeno succeeded in bribing the Almighty God by alms-giving, so that he escaped the punishment he had long deserved. Baronius, writing of the year 474, relates that a certain poor woman, whom this emperor had persecuted most unjustly, threw herself on her knees before a picture of the Mother of God, and cried out: "avenge me on Zeno."³ Whereupon the Blessed Virgin answered her, believe me, I have not been careless of your interests all this time, and would long ago have inflicted the desired punishment on him: "but his hand prevents me."⁴ "For he was," says the historian, "very charitable and good to the poor."⁵

Therefore
sinners
should give
generous
alms to sat-
isfy for
their sins.

Hear, O sinners, cries out St. John Chrysostom; you, who on account of the multitude and deformity of your crimes despair of finding mercy and grace at the hands of God, take courage; no matter how great your wickedness, how numerous your sins; not one of you has cause to despond, much less to despair; only give alms according to your means, and you will find it a most powerful means of obtaining the grace of repentance and the forgiveness of your sins from the mercy of God. King Nabuchodonosor, who was a monster of wickedness, when the Prophet Daniel announced to him, in the name of God, the dreadful punishment that was in store for him, could, if he had followed the Prophet's advice, have escaped that punishment by the same means; for Daniel said to him: "Wherefore, O King, let my counsel be acceptable to thee." And what was the counsel? "redeem thou thy sins with alms, and thy iniquities with works

¹ Lavabo inter innocentes manus meas.—Ps. xxv. 6.

² Lavabo inter innocentes manus meas, id est, opera macula peccati lavacro eleemosynæ.

³ Vindica me de Zenone.

⁴ Sed manus ejus prohibet me

⁵ Erat enim valde misericors et eleemosynas faciens.

of mercy to the poor: perhaps He will forgive thy offenses.”¹ Read the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke; there you will see how Jesus Christ condemns the Pharisees and their hideous vices. “Woe to you, Pharisees!”² He says frequently; woe to you, hypocrites! “because you are as sepulchres that appear not,” etc.³ They are condemned and rejected most vehemently several times. And why? Was their condition really desperate? No. Was there no means of salvation for them? Certainly, there was. What was it? Our Lord Himself tells them: “But yet that which remaineth, give alms: and behold all things are clean unto you.”⁴ As if He meant, says Venerable Bede, “this is the only chance of salvation remaining for you; give alms and be generous to the poor.”⁵ And St. John Chrysostom, speaking of charity towards the needy, exclaims: “this is the medicine for our vices; this cleanses the stains of the soul; this is the ladder that reaches up to heaven.”⁶ So powerful, my dear brethren, is alms-giving in appeasing the anger of God, and in blotting out or keeping off altogether the punishment due to our sins. But it is not less powerful with regard to the other object for which fasting is useful, namely, to keep our evil inclinations in check, to gain the favor and friendship of God, and to be freed from further sin, and from eternal damnation, as we shall now see in the

Second Part.

After the inordinate desires of the flesh and the innate appetite for carnal pleasures, common to all men, there is no inclination from which more sins arise than from the concupiscence of the eyes, that is, the inordinate desire of possessing worldly goods and of increasing one's store of them, which is also called avarice. If the heart of man is once taken up with this passion, then good-bye to devotion, piety, the fear of God, and justice. There is no use in looking for such things in one who is given to avarice; for there is no law so holy, that he is not ready to violate it for the sake of money; no sin so great, that he is not willing to commit it, if he can add to his store

Avarice
leads men
into almost
every vice.

¹ Quamobrem, rex, consilium meum placeat tibi, et peccata tua eleemosynis redime, et iniquitates tuas misericordie pauperum: forsitan ignoscet delictis tuis.—Dan. iv. 24.

² Vae vobis Phariseis.—Luke xi. 44.

³ Quia estis ut monumenta, quæ non apparent, etc.—Ibid.

⁴ Verumtamen quod superest, date eleemosynam, et ecce omnia munda sunt vobis.—Ibid. 41.

⁵ Hoc solum remedium restat: date eleemosynam.—V. Bede, l. iv. in Luc.

⁶ Hæc nostrorum scelerum est medicina; hæc animæ sordes emundat; hæc scala quæ in cælum usque pergitur.—St. Chrysos. hom. vi. in c. iii. ep. ad Titum.

thereby What the Holy Ghost Himself says, by the wise Ecclesiasticus, must be infallibly true: "Nothing is more wicked than the covetous man. There is not a more wicked thing than to love money; for such a one setteth even his own soul to sale; because while he liveth he hath cast away his bowels."¹ He forgets his own salvation; he forgets all about the kingdom of heaven, for which he is created; he forgets his God and his Creator; money is his heart, his soul, his only good, his god. And the worst and most dangerous characteristic of this vice is that there is hardly any means of healing it, once it has taken possession of the heart: for the inordinate desire of wealth cannot be satisfied even by the possession of that which it seeks. The more it has, the more it desires; the greater its wealth, the more eager its efforts to accumulate; and while nearly all the other vices decrease with old age, when health and strength begin to fail, avarice grows stronger, and follows a man even to the grave. Therefore it must be a great benefit for the soul to have found a remedy against this vice, for that remedy is also a preservative against countless sins. Is not that so, my dear brethren?

Generous
alms-giv-
ing con-
quers
avarice and
gains the
grace of
God.

This most powerful remedy is charity and mercy towards the poor; for generosity is a virtue directly opposed to avarice, since it perforce takes away the object of concupiscence of the eyes, that is, money and worldly goods, and gives it to others. Now, there can be no better and holier generosity than that which is exercised towards Our Lord Himself in the person of the poor, by alms-giving; and therefore he who is charitable to the poor and bestows on them generous alms, sharing his worldly goods with them, has certainly overcome the concupiscence of the eyes, and with it, temptations to many sins and vices. Besides, with regard to gaining the favor and friendship of God, and being preserved from further sin and from eternal damnation, who can promise himself that with greater confidence than the generous alms-giver? "Alms shall be a great confidence before the most high God, to all them that give it,"² says Tobias to his son; therefore, my son, if you wish to be a friend of God, follow my advice, and "give alms out of thy substance, and turn not away thy face from any poor person."³ The Holy Ghost confirms

¹ *Avaro autem nihil est scelestius. Nihil est iniquius quam amare pecuniam; hic enim et animam suam venalem habet; quoniam in vita sua projectit intima sua.*—Eccius. x. 9, 10.

² *Fiducia magna erit coram summo Deo eleemosyna omnibus facientibus eam.*—Tob. iv. 12.

³ *Ex substantia tua fac eleemosynam, et noli avertere faciem tuam ab ullo paupere.*—Ibid. 7.

that by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Be merciful to the fatherless as a father, and as a husband to their mother: and thou shalt be as the obedient son of the Most High, and He will have mercy on thee more than a mother."¹

And this follows necessarily from what we have seen in the first part. For, if an angry God allows Himself to be bribed by a great sinner who gives alms, and if He is appeased to such an extent, that He is ready to forget his transgressions, and, so to speak, is compelled to give him the grace of repentance, and to remit a great part of the punishment due to his sins, how will not the good and most generous God be influenced by the alms-giving of one who is already in the state of grace? Can that God, who never allows Himself to be outdone by His creatures in generosity, and who expressly says to us: "Give, and it shall be given to you,"² can He, I ask, refuse any favor to him who shares his worldly goods with God's poor children? Could a generous alms-giver be allowed to go into the everlasting flames of hell by that faithful God, who, when He will come to judge the living and the dead, will call His elect to His eternal kingdom only because they have been diligent in the performance of the works of Christian charity towards Him? "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you; . . . for I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat."³ No; there is no place in hell for the generous alms-giver. "For," continues Tobias, "alms deliver from all sin and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness."⁴ When the city of Sodom was destroyed by fire from heaven on account of its horrible crimes, Lot alone with his family was led out of it in safety by the angels; how did he merit that favor? By his generosity in giving alms, answers St. Peter Chrysologus; for Lot received the angels into his house, when they were in the appearance of poor wanderers, and entertained them hospitably; but, "the divine fire cannot burn mercy; and therefore," concludes the Saint, "let him who wishes to have no reason to fear the flames of hell practise mercy."⁵ St. John Chrysostom gives us the same exhortation:

Nay, often
saves the
soul from
hell.

¹ Esto pupillis misericors ut pater, et pro viro matri eorum: et eris tu velut filius Altissimi obediens, et miserebitur tui magis quam mater.—Eccles. iv. 10, 11.

² Date, et dabitur vobis.—Luke vi. 38.

³ Venite, benedicti Patris mei, possidete paratum vobis regnum; . . . esurivi enim, et dedistis mihi manducare.—Matt. xxv. 34, 35.

⁴ Quoniam eleemosyna ab omni peccato et a morte liberat, et non patietur animam ire in tenebras.—Tob. iv. 11.

⁵ Misericordiam nescit ignis divinus exurere; faciat ergo misericordiam, qui vult gehennæ incendium non timere.—St. Chrysol. serm. xiii.

"Therefore I beseech you, while we have time, let us blot out the stains of our souls by generous alms-giving; for there is nothing that can save us from the fire of hell so well as charity to the poor."¹ St. Augustine agrees with him: "Mercy stands at the gates of hell," he says, and "allows no one who is merciful to enter there."²

Shown by
an example.

Oh, if all who have the happy experience thereof could speak to us, and tell us how they escaped the fire of hell and gained the happiness of heaven, we should, indeed, acknowledge the truth of what we have seen hitherto! To pass over in silence many other examples of which ecclesiastical history is full, St. Peter Damian tells us of a nobleman in Germany who, as he was out hunting one cold winter's day, found a poor, ill-clad widow and her daughter trudging bare-foot through the snow. Filled with pity for the poor people, he took one of them up on his horse and commanded his servant to take up the other, and so they went on till they came to an inn, where the nobleman caused the two women to be well looked after, and before he went away he gave the mother his own cloak, that she might have some protection against the bitter cold. This act of charity soon met with an evident reward in the shape of the grace of a religious vocation, which the nobleman received, in consequence of which he left his servants all he possessed in the world, and retired into a monastery, there to serve God for the rest of his life. Not many years after he fell dangerously ill, and as he was in his death-agony he commenced to cry out most piteously to the brethren who were standing round; help me, said he; do you not see what a swarm of raging demons are waiting for my poor soul to carry it off to hell? The brethren began to pray, and tried to console the dying man by telling him to despise the temptations of the Evil One and to put his trust in God; but all to no purpose. At last the dying man turned to him who had formerly been his servant on the hunting expedition; look, said he to him with a cheerful countenance, do you not see the woman whom I took up behind me on my horse that day? She is standing by my bedside, holding in her hand the mantle I gave her to protect her from the cold; the moment she entered the room all the demons took to flight at once, and now, as a reward for my

¹ Idecirco obsecro, ut, cum tempus habemus, detergamus animi sordes largis elemosynis; nihil enim prorsus ita nos eximere potest a gehenna ignis, atque largitas elemosynæ.

² Ante fores gehennæ stat misericordiæ, et nullum misericordem permittit in carcerem mitti.—St. Aug. l. 50, hom. 39.

charity, she has invited me to enter into heaven. Having said these words, he gave up his happy soul.

Still more wonderful is the event which, according to the learned Cardinal Baronius, happened in the year 1537 at Alexandria, during the patriarchate of Paul, to a heathen girl. The latter had been deprived of her parents by death, but had been left in good circumstances. One day she saw a man trying to hang himself with a rope; full of fright, she cried out: "unhappy man, what are you doing?" "Leave me alone," said he; "I am weary of life; I am so deeply involved in debt, that my creditors importune me wherever I go, and I have no means of paying them; therefore I am in a state of desperation, and am resolved to make away with myself in order to get out of my misery." "No," said the compassionate child; "do not do that; take all I have, and pay your debts, and do not put an end to yourself." And she actually gave him all she had. But what did she do herself? She had nothing more, and there was not a soul to whom she could appeal for help; so, in order to save herself from beggary, she resolved to give herself up to a life of impurity, and carried her resolution into effect. After some considerable time, the unhappy girl fell dangerously ill, when she entered into herself, saw the error of her ways, and begged of the bishop to baptize her, that she might be cleansed from her sins and die as a Christian; but neither the bishop nor any other person would have anything to do with her on account of the life she had been leading. As she was thus abandoned by God and man, and was bitterly bewailing her unhappy condition, an angel appeared to her in the form of the man to whom she had given all her property. "How are you?" he asked her. "Ah, my good friend," she answered, "death is not far from me; I am very anxious to be baptized and to die a Christian, but no one will help me to carry out my wishes." "Be comforted," said the supposed man; "I will help you;" and he at once sent for a priest and deacon to instruct her, after which he immediately vanished. When the bishop was told that the woman had been publicly baptized, he grew very angry, summoned the priest and deacon before him, and asked them how did they dare to baptize such a person. "A certain man," they answered, "sent for us suddenly; who he was, we know not, for as soon as we had done our duty, he disappeared." The bishop was filled with amazement at this, and thought that there was something miraculous about it. He went at once to the sick woman, and said to her: "my daughter, tell

Confirmed
by another.

me, what kind of a life have you led? What good have you done?" "Alas," said she, "I have lived as a public sinner, as every one knows." "But," continued the bishop, "have you never done a good act in your life?" "No," was the answer; "none that I know of; yet, now that I remember it, when I was a little girl I saw a man about to hang himself on account of his debts, and, moved with pity, I gave him all I had; the same man came to me lately, and did for me what no one else would do, for he helped me to receive baptism." Hardly had she said these words, when she died. "O God of goodness," exclaimed the bishop, "how wonderfully just and holy are Thy judgments!" And how true it is, I conclude, that "alms deliver from all sin, and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness."

Conclusion
and exhortation
to
give generous
alms.

My dear brethren, if we were all to look back on our past lives, we should find a great many sins and transgressions of the divine law, for which we are still indebted to the justice of God, and therefore we have good reason to fear that in those times, which seem so full of danger, we shall have some calamity to suffer. If we consider our future lives, we must humbly acknowledge that we are in need of the favor of special grace of God, in order to be preserved from sin, and, what is all-important, to be saved from an unhappy death and from the eternal damnation that follows it. Now, we have a sure means of securing both those objects in generous alms-giving and in Christian charity towards the poor. Let us, then, constantly practise this virtue according to our means, and thus bribe our divine Judge to forget our sins, and, if we have not yet repented, to give us the grace of true contrition, while by the same means, too, we shall make sure of the friendship of the Most High, so that He will keep us from sin, and will protect us in our last moments from the attacks of the Evil One. Father Drexelius, who was himself present, and saw the whole circumstance, relates that a certain rich man was dangerously ill, and was warned that it was time for him to give up all unnecessary cares for earthly things, to raise up his mind to heaven, and, as his last moment had come, to prepare for eternity. "Ah," sighed he, "I see the gate of heaven far off, but I see, too, that it is bolted against me. Who will open it to me, that I may enter?" Such thoughts and words are not unusual with dying people, when they feel the approach of death. What was to be done? asks Father Drexelius. How was the gate of heaven to be opened to him? Here

is what I said to him: "Take your money and make for yourself gold and silver keys, with which you will be able to open a thousand locks." But in order that those precious keys may not be lost commit them to the charge of the poor; they will keep them safe for you, and will give them over to you without fail at the gate of heaven." The same advice I give, my dear brethren, to all who are in a position to help the poor. There are some, perhaps, who cannot fast, according to the Christian law (for this once I am willing to believe that they have a good reason for not fasting); then, in that case, let them at least open their purse-strings to feed Christ in the person of His poor; they certainly should not dare to evade this obligation, as I have shown at length on a former occasion. We have opportunities enough to show our generosity; there are poor and needy enough, who suffer the pangs of hunger, either in the public streets or in their own houses, where they cry for bread with their famished children; there are poor citizens and peasants enough, who, with tears in their eyes, offer the little money they have for the necessities of life, and often cannot get them. Ah, be merciful and help those people as well as you can! If we have not much, then let us give of the little that God bestows on us back again to Christ in the person of His poor, according to the advice of Tobias to his son: "According to thy ability be merciful; if thou have much, give abundantly; if thou have little, take care even so to bestow willingly a little; for thus thou storest up to thyself a good reward for the day of necessity, that is, for the end of thy life." Christians, let us all profit by this good advice; and the good and most generous God will never turn away His face from us; we shall have some hope left in those troublous and dangerous times of escaping a general calamity, and, at all events, we can be quite sure that we shall get rid of the punishment due to our sins, and, what should be our chief concern in this vale of tears, that one day, after our death, the same poor whom we have helped in this life will, according to the promise of Our Lord, receive us into eternal tabernacles. Amen.

On the Obligation of Alms-giving, and also on the Temporal as well as the Eternal Advantage to be derived from it, see several sermons in the preceding First Part.

¹ Claves facito argenteas et aureas; istis vel mille seras recludas.

² Pauperibus eas committe perferendas.

³ Quomodo potueris, ita esto misericors; si multum tibi fuerit, abundanter tribue; si exiguum tibi fuerit, etiam exiguum libenter impertiri stude; præmium enim bonum tibi thesaurizas in die necessitatis. — Tob. iv. 8-10.

ON PATIENCE UNDER TRIALS.

FORTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE ADVANTAGE OF TRIALS, AS A MEANS OF ATONING FOR SIN.

Subject.

The trials of this world, when they are borne with patience and resignation to the will of God, are a good cross, for they are a satisfaction for the greatest evil which we have deserved by our sins; therefore we must accept them willingly from the hand of God and bear them with patience.—*Preached on the Feast of St. Andrew, the Apostle.*

Text.

O bona crux.—Ex verbis Sti. Andreae Apostoli.

“O good cross.”—Such was the exclamation of St. Andrew, when he embraced the cross on which he was to suffer.

Introduction.

But, great Saint, what is the meaning of those words? Can the cross, which the world has always so hated, be good? Can that be good which is the reward of thieves and murderers? which takes away life and everything else from you? Tell that to delicate worldlings; nay, show them your cross at a distance, and they will fly from it in horror; they will look on it as a cursed thing; but you say that it is good? Yes, my dear brethren, the holy Apostle of Jesus Christ, as well as other enlightened souls, knew well what a great treasure is hidden under the cross. And if we judged of things, not according to the dictates of our personal comfort and sensuality, but according to reason and to the will and intention of God, we should also cry out with Andrew: “O good cross.” I have recently treated of this matter, and have shown that the trials of this life are a good cross for us, and especially for those who are in the state of sin, because the good God thereby impels the sinner to do penance.

To-day I shall explain the same matter further, and shall show how, for another reason, those trials are a good cross for us. I say, then,

Plan of Discourse.

The trials of this world, when they are borne with patience and resignation to the will of God, are a good cross, for they are a satisfaction for the greatest evil which we have deserved by our sins; therefore we must accept them willingly from the hand of God, and bear them with patience. Such is the whole subject of this discourse.

May it serve to console those who, having sinned (and they are unfortunately in the majority), must bear afflictions, and to instruct all who are afflicted, that they may bear their trials with patience, and thereby be kept from sin. Do thou, O Mother of sorrows, and you, holy guardian angels, and you, too, holy St. Andrew, Apostle of the cross, obtain for us this grace from the crucified God, so that, filled with consolation, we, too, may say: "O good cross."

Of two evils of which we must necessarily suffer one, we should certainly choose and desire that which is the lesser and the easier to bear; and he who allows you to select a lesser calamity, that you may avoid a greater one, does you a service. A debtor would be very grateful to the creditor to whom he owes ten thousand dollars, if the latter would ask him for only a hundred. You would thank me if I were to pull you out of the river by the hair of the head, and thereby save your life, although I should cause you some pain in doing so. A criminal, caught in the act, and hurried into prison, would be very glad to escape with a few hours' confinement and a flogging, inflicted on him to appease the anger of the people outside, who have taken up stones to fling at him, and who can be quieted only by being told that the thief has suffered due punishment. All three, although they have had to suffer, would cry out, with joy and gratitude: it is well for me that I was put into prison; I am glad that by having a few hairs pulled out of my head my life has been saved; it is well for me that I got off so easily. Is not that the case, my dear brethren?

O man, whoever you are, who have transgressed the divine law and sinned grievously, even if it is only in thought, and but once in your whole life, have you ever seriously considered what

Of two evils
the lesser
should be
chosen.

The sinner
has griev-
ously of-
fended God.

you have done ; what a terrible evil you have brought on yourself ? You have made an enemy of the great, infinite, and almighty God, and have incurred His anger, hatred, and reprobation. But that is not all, although it is the worst of all evils ; you have, besides, contracted a debt which you can never pay out of your own resources alone. You have plunged into a boundless sea, a profound abyss of punishment, out of which no man or angel can free you, for all eternity ; you have given yourself up to the rage of the demons, who would have tortured you, without end or limit, in the flames of hell. Now, as you have repented, the good God has certainly forgiven your sin, and also laid aside His anger against you ; He has freed you from the pains of hell, but that does not yet suffice. How so ?

So that he
must be
punished in
this life or
in the next.

Imagine that a dissolute, ungrateful son has run away from his loving father, and done some shameful deed, that brings dishonor on the whole family. He comes back repentant, and, falling at his father's feet, bathed in tears, begs to be forgiven ; what does his loving and merciful father do ? See, he says, you wicked child, I had fully made up my mind to disinherit you, and not to look on you any longer as my son, yet I pardon you this once ; you shall be my son as before, but I cannot allow your crime to go unpunished ; you must feel the father's rod in chastisement. In the same way our heavenly Father acts towards the man who runs away from Him by mortal sin ; after confession He receives him again into favor, out of mercy ; but He still keeps in reserve the punishment which His justice must inflict on sin. He changes the eternal into a temporal punishment, so as to make up in some measure for the pains of hell, nor can any sinner have the least hope that God will give way in the least on this point, or allow the least sin to go unpunished. Sin is an act of disobedience, which must necessarily be chastised ; by whom ? St. Augustine answers, " either by man inflicting voluntary penance on himself, or by God, who punishes the sinner." ¹ And where will He inflict that punishment ? Either here in this life, or in the next life. In what manner ? Here, by temporal calamities, crosses, and trials, with which He visits sinners on earth, and, according to the Council of Trent, if those trials are willingly received and borne with patience and humility, as coming from the hands of God, they will be accepted by Him in satisfaction for our sins ; in the next life this satisfaction must be made by a burning and purifying fire.

¹ Aut ab homine penitente, aut a Deo vindicante.

It now remains to be seen which of those two punishments we should make choice of; and you will all agree with me in saying that we ought to choose the easier and more salutary. If you, O man, put off the settlement of your accounts in this respect till the next life, then you will have far more terrible torments to suffer. Hear what St. Cæsarius says of it: "That purgatorial fire will be far more severe than any punishment that could be thought of, or seen, or felt in this life."¹ Read that golden book of Thomas à Kempis, the "Imitation of Christ," and there you will find the following words: "there," that is, in purgatory, "one hour of torments will be more intolerable than a hundred years here in the severest pains and works of penance." And I am forced to believe those holy servants of God in this matter when I consider the circumstances of the case. For, in the first place, the temporal trials and crosses that we suffer in this life, generally speaking, affect only the mortal body, while in the other life it is the soul separated from the body that must endure punishment. Now, the more tender and delicate a nature is, the greater its capacity for feeling pain; and what can be more tender than the soul, which is simple, without parts, and therefore suffers in its whole essence and substance? If my eye pains me, the hands, feet, and the rest of the body are free from pain; but if some disease were to attack at once every part of my body, head, eyes, hands, feet, and stomach, the tortures I should suffer would be far more intolerable than if one member only of the body were affected. How great, then, must not be the torments of the soul, which cannot suffer without its whole substance being affected in all its faculties? How great must not be the torments of such a tender soul, of a soul that is, so to speak, infinitely sensitive, since it is the origin of all the sensation we have in our bodies? Besides, the trials we have to suffer in this life are mostly inflicted by men and other creatures, who cause us to suffer loss, poverty, trouble, or persecution; but in the next life it is the God of infinite justice who will inflict the punishment. "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you, my friends," cry out the souls in purgatory, in the words of Job. And why should we have pity on you? What is the matter with you? "Because the hand of the Lord hath touched me."² Mark, my dear brethren, that they do not complain of the heat

The punishment of the next life is worse than the trials of this.

¹ Ille purgatorius ignis durior erit, quam quicquid potest poenarum in hoc sæculo aut cogitari, aut videri, aut sentiri.

² Misere mini mei, misere mini mei, saltem vos amici mei; quia manus Domini tetigit me.—Job xix. 21.

of the fire which burns them, nor of the darkness in which they are confined, nor of the rage of the demons who mock them; it is the hand of God that causes them pain: "have pity on me, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me."

The latter are very slight, compared to the former.

Now I understand why the Holy Scripture, speaking of the trials of this life, makes so little of them; and why St. Paul describes them as momentary and slight. "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation," etc.; 'and why the Prophet David, speaking of the great persecutions and crosses that the Israelites had to suffer from the Idumæans, Philistines, and other enemies, says nothing more to God, than, "Thou hast showed Thy people hard things."'¹ "Thou hast given a warning to them that fear thee."² What? A warning? Had they not severe calamities to suffer in those days? It is this, says Bellarmine, that shows the goodness and mercy of God, who sends us trials here, as it were, only to frighten us; for they are far lighter and easier to bear than we imagine; nay, they are to be accounted as nothing, when compared to the punishment that our sins deserve in the next life. St. Paul, as St. Augustine remarks, speaks of the trials and crosses of this life as one would speak of the vain phantoms of a dream. He who has dreamt during the night would not say, when relating his dream, I have eaten, or drunk, or found a treasure; but, I thought I ate, or drank, or that I was digging for a treasure. A poor, hungry, and thirsty beggar often speaks in that way, but he remains just as much a beggar as he was before. Such, too, is the way in which the Apostle speaks to the Corinthians, when exhorting them to patience in all tribulations. "As dying," he says, "and behold we live: as chastised, and not killed: as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing: as needy, yet enriching many: as having nothing, and possessing all things."³ Our sickness and death are but the shadow of sickness and death; our chastisement is only the appearance of a chastisement; our sadness, the phantom of sadness; our poverty, the bare image of poverty; in fact, none of these things can be looked on as a real evil or misfortune.

Nay, they are reck-

Yes, you say to me, it is easy for you to talk; God help me, my trials are not a mere shadow, I feel them keenly enough

¹ Id enim, quod in præsentī est momentaneum et leve tribulationis nostræ.—II. Cor. iv. 17.

² Ostendisti populo tuo dura.—Ps. lix. 5.

³ Dedisti metuentibus te significationem.—Ibid. 6.

⁴ Quasi morientes, et ecce vivimus: ut castigati, et non mortificati: quasi tristes, semper autem gaudentes: sicut egentes, multos autem locupletantes: tamquam nihil habentes, et omnia possidentes.—II. Cor. vi. 9, 10.

every day; my illness, desolation, poverty, trouble, and the persecution I have to endure, are not shadows; they are real illness, desolation, poverty, trouble, and persecution. I acknowledge that what you complain of is quite true; but will you not feel the reality of suffering in the next life, too, if you will have to atone to the divine justice for your sins in purgatory? No matter how great, bitter, or cruel our sufferings are here, they are very slight, nay, nothing at all, when compared to the punishments of the next life. For during this life God punishes our sins according to the measure of His goodness and mercy, and, like a father with his dear child, the chastisements He inflicts on us are not nearly as severe as we deserve. Moreover, our trials in this life, when borne patiently with a supernatural intention for God's sake, are of great value and merit when united with the infinite merits, with the passion and death of Jesus Christ, who places that treasure in our hands, that we may pay the debt we have contracted with our heavenly Father. Hence, if we bear our cross according to the all-wise arrangement, the good will, and pleasure of God, and, so to speak, with Jesus Christ, we can, by suffering meritoriously for one hour here, do more to pay what we owe the divine justice, than by enduring the grievous torments of purgatory for many years. For in the next life it is the divine justice alone that will take sword in hand and strike without mercy; not the least thing will be remitted or condoned; the punishment will be measured out according to the debt contracted by sin; for there, there will be no merit, or satisfaction, or union with the sufferings of Christ to be hoped for: "Thou shalt not go out from thence till thou repay the last farthing."¹

Now, O mortal, if you have ever sinned grievously in your life, you can see what a good cross it is for you to have to suffer contradictions in this life, and what a great and precious grace and benefit the good God bestows on you by inflicting His paternal chastisements on you for a short time here, that He may save you from a far greater evil, and enable you to escape the inexorable severity of His justice. To realize more fully the greatness of this benefit, consider the number of sins you have committed since you first came to the use of reason, down to the present moment; examine all the glances of your eyes, the curiosity of your ears, the touches of your hands, the speeches of your tongue, the movements of your body, the thoughts and desires of

oned as
nothing.

Therefore
contradictions are a
mild punishment, especially for
him who
has sinned
often.

¹ Non exies inde donec reddas novissimum quadrantem.—Matt. v. 26.

your heart; count up how many sins you have committed through wilful malice, how many through weakness and carelessness, how many in thought, how many in act, how many by omission, how many knowingly, how many through ignorance, how many secretly, how many in company; how many sins of your own you committed; how many you caused others to commit by negligence or scandal-giving; how many mortal, how many venial sins you have been guilty of, and how many you have altogether forgotten. Alas, what a fearful number of sins you will discover! And how long do you think you will have to suffer for them in that painful prison in the next life? Perhaps twenty years? Perhaps a hundred years? Perhaps a thousand years? Perhaps till the Day of Judgment? You know nothing about it; but there is one thing you can be quite assured of, and that is that, even if the good God forgives all those sins, you will still have to suffer for them, unless you atone for them in this life. And what atonement have you offered for them hitherto? What penance have you done? What would you say if penances were to be imposed nowadays, similar to those of olden times? A most severe penance of five years was imposed for the habit of drunkenness, seven years for a public sin against holy purity, eleven years for a false oath or giving false witness, fifteen years for adultery, and twenty years for murder. Where should we find time and years enough to satisfy for numerous mortal sins, and how wretched would seem the penance we have hitherto done? We have confessed our sins, perhaps, as candidly as we were obliged to do; we have struck our breasts a few times, and made an act of contrition out of our prayer-books or by heart; perhaps it proceeded from a true supernatural motive; we have said with the lips: I purpose to amend my life, and perhaps we have been in earnest; we have said a rosary or performed whatever penance our confessor enjoined on us, and we persuade ourselves we have settled the whole business completely thereby.

So that he should rejoice, if by suffering here he can escape the punishment of the next life.

Such has perhaps been your conduct hitherto, O mortal, and, moreover, you have been daily adding to the punishment due to your sins, by committing at least venial sins; have you, then, reason (and this is a question that deserves your serious consideration) to complain if the good God sends you crosses and trials? Should you not rather esteem yourself fortunate, and kiss the hand that chastises so gently with the greatest humility, nay, with the greatest joy, when you remember that the God whom you have so often and so grievously offended is pleased to accept the

few crosses of short duration that you have to bear in your state of life, according to His decree, in place of the terrible punishments that by right you should have to suffer in the fiery prison of the next life, provided you only bear those crosses with resignation to His will, with meekness and patience, with a supernatural intention, and with constancy? And, certainly, the good God will be content with those dispositions on your part; for, as Tertullian says, His chief object in punishing here is to save from eternal punishment hereafter.¹

To return to the similes I have adduced already, He acts like that steward in the Gospel of St. Luke, who was accused to his lord of having squandered away his goods, and was therefore on the point of being dismissed. How did he act? "Therefore, calling together every one of his lord's debtors, he said to the first: How much dost thou owe my lord? But he said: a hundred barrels of oil." Go, said the steward to him, "take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty." And you, he said to another, "how much dost thou owe?" "A hundred quarters of wheat," was the answer. "He said to him: Take thy bill and write eighty."² O sinful man, in the same way, it seems to me, your sovereign Lord and God speaks to you: "How much dost thou owe? My justice? What do you owe on account of the misspent years of your youth? What do you owe on account of the vicious life you led afterwards? What do you owe for the ten, thirty, forty, fifty years, or more, that you have spent, perhaps, in heaping sin on sin? "How much dost thou owe," O woman? What do you owe My justice for the precious time given you for the purpose of saving your soul, but which you have squandered away so frivolously? What do you owe for the idleness in which you have lived? What do you owe for the unlawful passion in which you have indulged? What do you owe for having enticed others to impure love by your allurements, caresses, or extravagant dress? for the hearts that you have, as it were, bewitched and stolen from Me? for the souls of your own children, whom you have brought up in worldly luxury, so that you are to blame for the sins they commit? "How much dost thou owe," O man? What do you owe for your sins of gluttony and habitual drunkenness? What do you

Shown by a simile from Holy Scripture.

¹ Ut temporali afflictione æterna supplicia expungat.

² Convocatis itaque singulis debitoribus domini sui, dicebat primo: quantum debes domino meo? At ille dixit: centum cados olei. Dixitque illi: Accipe cautionem tuam, et sede cito, scribe quinquaginta. Deinde alii dixit: Tu vero, quantum debes? Qui ait: Centum coros tritici. Ait illi: Accipe litteras tuas, et scribe octoginta.—Luke xvi. 5-7.

owe for the scandal you have given? for your crimes of impurity and adultery? for your many acts of injustice, usury, and unfair dealings? for your unbridled anger, your vindictiveness, your slanders and calumnies against your neighbor? for your abominable cursing and swearing? for the quarrelling and dissensions you have caused in your family? for your great sloth and carelessness in My service? "How much dost thou owe" for all this? Ah, your debts are almost without number; and if I were to deal with you according to the strictness of My justice, I would pitilessly hurl you into hell amongst the demons, or else I would condemn you to suffer a thousand years in purgatory. But I do not wish to act so severely with you; I will let you off easier. "Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty;" do as I tell you; suffer patiently for a few days, or months, or years, those trifling pains with which I visit you, and I will be satisfied. Instead of the hundred years you should have spent in purgatory, in order to pay off your debts, "write fifty;" be patient towards this enemy of yours, who persecutes you everywhere; bear meekly with the faults of your drunken husband, who treats you so cruelly; bear with your peevish wife and her ill-humor; with father, or mother, or ill-reared child; with obstinate servants or hard-hearted masters; with that faithless friend, that quarrelsome neighbor, who causes you so much trouble. In a word, no matter what it is, or where it comes from, take up this cross, and bear it for My sake; it is your bill. "Take thy bill and write fifty;" by means of it you can get rid of thirty, forty, fifty, or more years of suffering in the next life; and if, moreover, you bear this contradiction with Christian patience and constancy, you will satisfy My justice in full.

Confirmed
by other
similes.

"How much dost thou owe?" O sinner, what have you deserved on account of your past transgressions? You should now be sunk in that raging, roaring lake of fire, in which you would be, as it were, drunk with intolerable torments, but the good and merciful God drags you out of it by the hair of the head. He hurts you and causes you pain by the fever or other painful illness which takes away the strength of your body, and deprives you of all pleasure; He hurts you by taking away from you by death the husband, wife, child, or dear friend whom you loved so much; He hurts you by that misfortune which He sends you, by that unmerited oppression, or the bad season which has deprived you of your worldly goods, and thereby caused you to go down in the world, or reduced you to secret poverty. But do

not complain with bitterness; be satisfied and rejoice rather, and give thanks to your good God, because He has thereby saved you from far greater and more terrible torments. "How much dost thou owe?" What have you deserved? Long ago the divine justice has cried out for vengeance, and has called out to its ministers, away with that wretch, that rebel, throw him into prison; but the merciful God has taken His fatherly rod in His hand, and chastised you by a trial of short duration, so that He can say to His justice, be still, he is already punished, and must not suffer twice for the same fault. I have already tamed his pride, by putting him to public shame; I have punished his avarice and his concupiscence of the eyes, by temporal losses; his carnal pleasures, by bodily sufferings; his gluttony and drunkenness, by poverty, hunger, and thirst; his vindictiveness and enmity, by submitting him to persecution. He has accepted those trials with willingness and patience, and has received them from My hand, humbly acknowledging his fault, so that he has paid off everything.

O God of goodness, how is it that Thou art so gracious to us here on earth? In truth, I must acknowledge, with Thy Prophet David, "Thou wast a merciful God to them, and taking vengeance on all their inventions;"¹ that is, Thou hast, indeed, taken vengeance on their sins, but in such a way as to show them the greatest grace and favor; for Thou didst inflict on them a very slight chastisement, instead of the severe punishment they deserved for their sins. Alas, that we men should be so blind as to have such little appreciation of this priceless benefit! If we could only hear the terrible cries with which, I will not say the damned in hell, but the souls in purgatory bewail their miserable condition, what a far different opinion we should have, and how far more highly we should appreciate the trials and contradictions of this life. Alas, they cry out in the flames, "the hand of the Lord hath touched me," and we could have avoided those pains so easily, if we had wished, during our mortal lives! Oh, cries out one, would that I had been always in bed, suffering from all imaginable illnesses! Would that I had lived in continual poverty, hunger, and thirst, sighs another. Oh, that all men had risen up against me, and had persecuted me in every possible way, exclaims a third, for then I should not have to endure such long and fearful torments! If the just God were to allow me to return again to life in order to satisfy

Hence he must thank God for trials, as for a benefit.

¹ Deus tu propitius fuisti eis, et ulciscens in omnes adinventiones eorum.—Ps. xcvi. 8.

for the year, the month, the day, nay, even the single hour I have still to suffer here, I would with the greatest joy and gratitude bear all the bitterness and trouble of the whole world for a countless number of years.

And he who
is impatient
under trials
acts un-
justly.

I have a heart-felt compassion for those poor souls, my dear brethren, but I do not know whether I should not bewail far more the really unfortunate trials that so many of us mortals have to suffer. Ah, how unjust we are towards the good God, when we complain that He is too hard on us, and that He causes us too much pain, for He always means so well to us. How unjust we are to our own souls, when we bear the cross, that we must bear in any case, and cannot avoid, with murmurs and discontent, with cursing and swearing, without any good intention directed to God, and simply because we are forced to bear it, so that the very means that we could have used to wipe out our debt of punishment becomes the cause of increasing that debt; the means by which we could and should have appeased the God whom we have offended we misuse to embitter Him still more against us, and, instead of extinguishing the flames that are destined to torture us, we rather pour oil on them, and increase their violence, thus making our sufferings in the next life longer, because we have suffered for a short time here below. We are like the wild beast in the forest, that, when wounded, runs away from one hunter only to fall into the hands of another. In the same way, when we are wounded by the chastening rod of the good God, instead of hastening to Him, and loving Him all the more, in order to rejoice with Him hereafter in heaven (for that is His only object in sending us contradictions), we run farther and farther away from Him by our impatience, and often separate ourselves from Him to such an extent, that we fall into the clutches of the devil. Is not that a lamentable state of things?

Exhortation
to bear all
trials pa-
tiently in
the spirit of
penance.

Ah, oppressed souls, whatever be the cross under which you are groaning, I beg of you, let us be reasonable, and use for our own greater good this great benefit; let us at least make a virtue of necessity, and while we weep and moan under the cross, let us humbly resign ourselves to the will of God. Weep and moan, I say, for that does not mean giving way to impatience; we cannot help feeling the pain, and that is the very reason why God visits us with contradictions. Let us weep, then; our tears will help us to recover health and will free us from the filth of our sins. "Why dost thou fear the fire," asks St. Augustine, "that

cleanses thee?"¹ Oh, woe to us, if God were to allow us to lead lives of pleasure in this world, and were to withdraw from us His fatherly chastisements! Woe to us, if He does not help us to pay what we owe Him by inflicting trials on us in this life; if He does not make us feel the rod here below. For then we should be like the servant who has broken some costly vessel; if the master keeps silent, the servant will be deprived of his wages in order to make the loss good, but if he reproves the servant, the latter is then free from further punishment. If the merciful God does not punish us now, we shall be written down in the book of His justice, and will have to satisfy that justice to the full hereafter. Therefore, let us profit by that earnest exhortation which Our Lord gives us in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Be at agreement with thy adversary betimes, whilst thou art in the way with him."² This adversary is the Almighty God, whom you have so often and so grievously offended; be at agreement with Him speedily, and be resigned to His fatherly will, "whilst thou art in the way." For, if you neglect doing so, if you strive against Him (and what good will that do you?), what will happen to you? "Lest perhaps the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Amen, I say to thee, thou shalt not go out from thence till thou repay the last farthing."³

Do not think or say, what have I done more than others, to be afflicted so severely? Ask your own conscience what you have done at different times, in different places, to offend God; it will answer and tell you plainly enough that you are not treated unjustly. Say humbly, with the Prophet Job: "I have sinned, and indeed I have offended, and I have not received what I have deserved."⁴ What I now suffer is slight indeed, compared to my sins. I have deserved the everlasting fire of hell; I have deserved it a hundred times; I have deserved it oftener than many thousand souls that are now suffering there. Ten, twenty, thirty, forty years ago I should have been damned; and yet do I dare to complain because the merciful God is now satisfied to inflict on me such a slight and short trial, which He will accept from me in full compensation for all that I owe Him for my sins? True, I feel the great pain and inward heat caused by this ill-

Humble acknowledgment of and thanksgiving for the trials sent us by God.

¹ Quid times ignem, qui tibi sordes tollit?

² Esto consentiens adversario tuo cito dum es in via cum eo.—Matt. v. 25.

³ Ne forte tradat te adversarius iudici, et iudex tradat te ministro, et in carcerem mittaris.

⁴ Amen, dico tibi, non exies inde, donec reddas novissimum quadrantem.—Ibid. 25, 26.

⁵ Peccavi, et vere deliqui, et, ut eram dignus, non recepi.—Job xxxiii 27.

ness from which I am suffering; but "I have not received what I have deserved;" this illness is nothing to the fire that I should suffer in the next life. I am filled with sorrow at that premature death, which has caused me the greatest grief; "but I have not received what I have deserved;" my grief is nothing to that undying worm of conscience, which should torture me forever. This want and poverty that I have to suffer in secret is hard to bear; "but I have not received what I have deserved:" it is nothing to that hunger and thirst which I should endure for all eternity. This disgrace, this public shame and humiliation seems insupportable to me; but "I have not received what I have deserved;" it is nothing to the shame that should cover me for all eternity. My husband, or wife, or master, or mistress, or servant, or neighbor, or enemy, or friend, causes me to suffer many contradictions; but "I have not received what I have deserved;" these people are not cruel demons, nor can they torture me forever. I am rejected, humbled, and despised by others; I am a poor orphan, and in a state of destitution, but my state is not yet as miserable as it should be, for I am not yet abandoned by God and by all creatures. No, my God; I must again acknowledge that all my crosses and trials are but a shadow when compared to what I have deserved by my sins. Therefore, in future, I will be resigned to Thy holy and fatherly will; every day and hour, when I feel my cross weighing on me, I will cry out: "I have sinned, and indeed I have offended, and I have not received what I have deserved." I thank Thee a thousand times, O my heavenly Father, for not having spared me up to the present; for having been so merciful and good to me in this life. One thing I am sorrow for, and detest with my whole heart, and that is that I have had such little appreciation of this goodness of Thine, and have looked on it as cruelty, and that I have so often daily offended Thee by bearing my cross with murmuring and impatience. In future my cry shall be, "Lord, here burn, here cut, that Thou mayest spare me in eternity;"¹ and, filled with consolation, I will exclaim, with Thy holy Apostle St. Andrew, "O good cross!" O welcome trouble, that releases me from the greatest of troubles! Welcome poverty, that frees me from perpetual hunger and thirst! Welcome sickness, by which I can escape intolerable torments! Welcome contempt and persecution, which will save me from eternal shame! O good cross, by which I can in such a short time pay off such

¹ Domine, hic ure, hic seca, ut parcas in æternum.

enormous debts! Come; like Andrew, I will embrace thee with both hands, hold thee constantly, and, as long as is pleasing to God, bear thee with patience and joy, not as an act of vengeance on the part of the justice of God, to destroy me, but as a salutary gift of His mercy, by which He wishes to free me from the severe punishments I have deserved for my sins. O God, only grant me this patience, which I now humbly beg of Thee, and I will constantly confess, think, and say, “O good cross!” Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

Text.

Noli flere.—Luke vii. 13.

“Weep not.”

Introduction.

Ah, dear Lord, it is easy to say, “weep not;” but has not a poor widow, bereft of her husband, reason to weep? “Behold, a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother: and she was a widow.” He was the sole consolation left her. Had she not, then, cause to weep? No doubt, our compassionate Lord knew well that she had; and therefore He took pity on her, and restored her son to life: “and he that was dead sat up and began to speak. And He gave him to his mother.” My dear brethren, if I, too, were to say to you those words, weep not, there are many of you who would think, yes, it is easy for you to talk; if you knew the cross I have to bear, you would certainly speak differently to me. I am suffering secretly from poverty and want; have I not reason to weep? I have lost a great deal in those troublous times; have I not reason to be sad? I am attacked by a painful illness; shall I not weep? I am a desolate widow or orphan; shall I not weep? I have an intolerable cross to bear at home, in the person of a cruel and wicked husband, of a peevish and obstinate wife; shall I not weep, and give way to sadness? If you could by a word free us from our trouble, then we would change our tears into laughter, and our trouble into joy. And I quite believe what you say; but it is not in my power to free you from your cross. But I can say to you: poor, suffering Christians, who have such contradictions to endure, and have good reason for weeping, at least bear your cross and trial with patience and resignation to the will of God, and I assure you that this very trial will free you from a far

heavier cross, and from far greater suffering. Is not this promise of mine able to console you somewhat, and to persuade you that your cross is good and salutary for you? And that is what I am about to prove to you now.—*Plan of discourse as above.*

FORTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON TRIALS AS A JUST PUNISHMENT FOR ANY KIND OF SIN.

Subject.

We all deserve trials in this life, 1. on account of the venial sins we commit daily; 2. on account of the sins we have committed in our past lives.—*Preached on the feast of St. Laurence, Martyr.*

Text.

Ignem me examinasti, et non est inventa in me iniquitas.—Ps. xvi. 3.

“Thou hast tried me by fire, and iniquity hath not been found in me.”

Introduction.

Was it right and just to roast on a gridiron, and to allow to be slowly burnt to death, amid intolerable tortures, a St. Laurence, in whom no sin or injustice could be found? Is it right to condemn to death, and to death by fire, an innocent man, who cannot be convicted of any crime? For, even before putting an accused person to the question, some proof, at least, of his guilt must be forthcoming. How, then, did the just God allow such a thing? Such is the way in which we reason sometimes, my dear brethren, when we imagine that we are treated unjustly, if the good God visits us by crosses and trials, which, according to the words of St. Augustine on the text quoted, are compared in holy Scripture to fire: “tribulation may be called a fire, because it burns.”¹ Alas, we sigh, what evil have I done, that the hand of the Lord should press so heavily on me? But the God of infinite wisdom passes a far different judgment. If you, O man, who thus complain, had never committed a sin in your life; if you were more innocent than the holy martyr, St. Laurence; even

¹ *Ignis, quia, urit, vocanda est tribulatio.*—St. Aug. in Ps. xvi.

then you could not say that you are treated unjustly; for it is necessary that the fire of tribulation should try your virtue, and increase your merit. Still, that you may see how unjust it is to allege our virtue as an excuse, I shall show to-day that none of us, no matter how holy he may be, is so innocent that he does not richly deserve to be tried in the fire of tribulation.

Plan of Discourse.

Even if no grievous sin is found in us, yet the venial sins we commit are reason enough why we should be thus tried, as I shall show in the first and longer part. Even if we are now free from all sin, yet our past sins are reason enough why we should be thus tried as I shall show in the second part.

May my words prove a source of consolation even to the most just souls, so that they, as well as others, may take up their cross as a well-deserved punishment, bear it, like St. Laurence, with patience and constancy, and avoid sin above every other evil. And may God give us His light and grace to this end, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

If we look at those sins that we are accustomed to call small and venial as they are in themselves, and if we consider their innate malice, we should agree at once, without further proof, to the truth of this proposition, and should all humbly acknowledge that even for one venial sin we deserve to be severely tried by God with the hottest fire of temporal tribulations during this life. But since our understanding is darkened by the sin of our forefather Adam, and our judgment perverted, we are like one struck with paralysis, who is quite lame on one side of his body, while the other is strong and healthy. On the left side, on which we consider temporal trials and crosses, we are sensitiveness and delicacy itself, so much fear, horror, and aversion have we for them; but on the right side, which represents to us the spiritual evils of the soul, we are without feeling, and, like persons who have neither sense nor reason, we appreciate nothing truly. For we look on temporal goods, the esteem and respect of men, a high position, riches, freedom, health, and bodily comfort, as great and valuable possessions, so that the loss of such things, which is the result of trials and contradictions, seems to us exceedingly bitter and terrible. Therefore we cry out, oh, what that poor man has to suffer in that loss he experienced recently; how miserable the lot of those wretched people.

We look on temporal misfortunes as great evils.

who have hardly bread enough to feed themselves and their children; how deplorable the condition of that man, who is so unjustly persecuted; what a grief for that poor woman to have lost her husband by such an untimely death; how pitiable the fate of that sick man, who has been confined to his bed for such a long time; and so on. We look on all those things as exceedingly great evils, although in the sight of God they are very slight indeed.

And on venial sins as of small account.

But, on the other hand, what do we make of a venial sin? Oh, we think, what great harm can it be to tell a lie to please others, or in jest? What great harm can it be to indulge our curiosity by looking at a person of the opposite sex with vain pleasure, to give way to impatience and murmurs in contradictions, to put on a sour countenance, to give a sharp answer, to make a sarcastic remark or to indulge in some slight anger or dislike towards our neighbor, to give way to a voluntary distraction in prayer, to be guilty of irreverence in church or of carelessness in the service of God, or to indulge in vanity in dress, provided we give no scandal by such things? These and similar faults are of daily occurrence; and he who has nothing else to confess finds it difficult enough to awaken true sorrow for them; they are not considered as of any account, and, merely because they are not called mortal sins, people commit them without fear or shame, as if there was no evil or harm in them. Ah, if we only understood the bare name of sin; if we rightly comprehended what it is to offend the great and infinite majesty of God, who is worthy of all fear and love, and to insult Him by even one idle word, what a far different judgment we should form of those so-called small and venial sins, which are in reality, when we consider them with reference to God, very grievous evils.

Although one such sin is worse than all imaginable misfortunes.

Ask those holy Fathers and Doctors, who were so enlightened by the Spirit of God, and they will tell you about them. They will say that even one of those sins, no matter how small it seems to be, is an evil far more to be dreaded than all the sicknesses, troubles, and contradictions of this world put together. Why? Because venial sin offends the Lord God. And is not that bad enough? Venial sin is a certain dishonoring and contempt of God, so that we have reason to say with St. Dorotheus, and according to the opinion of all theologians, "that it would be far better for all created things to perish, and for heaven and earth to be destroyed, than that one venial sin should be com-

mitted." You are so grieved, O man, at the loss of an important law-suit of your temporal goods, at an injury offered you, or at the untimely death of some dear friend; how, then, can you look on that as a small evil which is worse than the destruction of all creatures? Imagine that at the present time all the kings and potentates of Europe are engaged in a bloody war; many thousands lose their lives; whole families are ruined; towns reduced to ashes; whole provinces laid waste; millions of men deprived of their substance and reduced to extreme poverty, while the whole European world is plunged in grief and suffering from famine. May the good God save us, you think, from such a dreadful calamity! And yet all this is a far less evil than a single voluntary distraction in prayer, or a single lie told in jest; and if you could by that lie avert all those temporal calamities, it would not be lawful for you to tell it, even if thereby you could also convert all sinners, and free all the souls out of purgatory, and the damned from hell, and bring them to heaven. All who have any understanding of the matter are fully agreed in this. Yet sometimes, when you are reproved for telling a lie, oh, you say, what harm is in it? I only did it to make people laugh, or to prevent disunion in the family. But do you not know that it would be a matter of far less importance, if, instead of that lie being told, your whole house and all it contains were struck by lightning and burnt to ashes? or if your husband, children, friend, were to fall down dead? or if he for whose pleasure you told the lie were to lose all that he has, his honor and good name before the world, his repose, pleasure, and joy, nay, even his very life?

You seem to be astonished at this, as it appears to you a strange proposition, but yet it is a self-evident truth; for the least transgression of the divine will is more to be feared, detested, condemned, and avoided than the destruction and ruin of all created things. What is it to the great God, who is infinitely happy in Himself, whether a man lives for a long or a short time, whether one's family is in good circumstances or not, whether this or that potentate gains a battle, whether the Turks or the Persians, the Germans or the Spaniards rule the world; whether this kingdom is laid waste while that other is exalted? The only thing of importance in the sight of God is, whether His creatures know, serve, and love Him above all things; so that all, great and small, rich and poor, prince and peasant, keep His law inviolate, dread offending Him more than anything else in any

For it offends God.

circumstances whatever, and give Him the honor that belongs to the sovereign Monarch of heaven. Now, this honor cannot be taken away from God by any temporal evil, no matter how great it is, but it is lessened by the smallest venial sin, even by a jocose lie. And now I ask you, my dear brethren, whether he who has deliberately committed a venial sin can with reason complain of being treated unjustly, or say that he suffers trials, or poverty, or misfortune without having deserved it, while the venial sin he has committed far surpasses all the imaginable evils of the whole world put together? But this is a matter we do not wish to understand; nor can we see how it is possible.

In the Old Law venial sins were severely punished by God.

Do Thou, then, O good and just God, explain to us this hitherto unintelligible truth. And how wilt Thou do it? By representing to us the terrible punishments Thou dost inflict on venial sin, thus showing, as Salvianus says, "that nothing by which God is offended can be looked on as of small account."¹ Read the Holy Scripture, and you will see that a certain woman was at once turned into a pillar of salt, as a just punishment. Who was she? The wife of the pious and God-fearing Lot, and that punishment was inflicted on her at the very moment when the angel was leading Lot and his family out of Sodom. What was her crime? She had turned aside, out of curiosity, to see the burning city: "And his wife, looking behind her, was turned into a statue of salt."² One of the Israelites was by divine command stoned to death by the people, as you may read in the Book of Numbers. Why? What crime had he committed? He had gathered a few sticks from the ground on the Sabbath day: "And it came to pass, when the children of Israel were in the wilderness, and had found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day, that they brought him to Moses. And the Lord said to Moses: Let that man die, let all the multitude stone him without the camp."³ Who would have thought it a grievous matter, worthy of death, to commit a fault in the ceremonies of the sacrifice, as Nadab and Abiu did by using unconsecrated fire in their censers? And yet, as a punishment for that fault, fire burst forth from beneath the altar and consumed them on the spot, as the Holy Scripture tells us in the same Book: "Now Nadab and Abiu died, without children, when they offered strange

¹ Ut nihil leve aestimetur, quo Deus læditur.

² Respiensque uxor ejus post se, versa est in statuam salis.—Gen. xix. 26.

³ Factum est autem, cum essent filii Israel in solitudine, et invenissent hominem colligentem ligna in die sabbati, obtulerunt eum Moysi. . . Dixitque Dominus ad Moysen: Mortemoriatur homo iste; obruat eum lapidibus omnis turba extra castra.—Num. xv. 32, 33, 37.

fire before the Lord, in the desert of Sinai.”¹ Was it such a great crime for king Saul, who was kept so long waiting for the arrival of the Prophet, to begin the sacrifice himself? And yet, as a punishment for having done so, it was at once announced to him that he should lose his crown: “And Samuel said to Saul: Thou hast done foolishly, and hast not kept the commandments of the Lord thy God, which He commanded thee,” and therefore, “thy kingdom shall not continue.”² Who would not think that Oza deserved to be rewarded rather than punished for having stretched out his hand to keep the Ark of the Covenant from falling? “Oza put forth his hand to the Ark of God and took hold of it: because the oxen kicked and made it lean aside;” and yet he was punished by being struck dead on the spot: “And the indignation of the Lord was enkindled against Oza, and He struck him for his rashness, and he died there before the Ark of God.”³ What would you say if I could show you an immense plain filled with dead bodies, and tell you at the same time that all that slaughter was due to one small sin? Yet such was once really the case. Read the twenty-fourth chapter of the Second Book of Kings, and you will see how David, wishing to know the number of his people, ordered them to be counted, and gave way to a feeling of vanity at being such a great king. On account of that vanity, which we might look on as laudable, since the cause of it proved that he was a careful ruler, who looked after his people, the following announcement was made to him by the Prophet on the part of God: “I give thee thy choice of three things, choose one of them which thou wilt, that I may do it to thee. Either seven years of famine shall come to thee in thy land; or thou shalt flee three months before thy adversaries, and they shall pursue thee; or for three days there shall be a pestilence in thy land.”⁴ David chose the latter punishment, “and in three days seventy thousand people died of the plague.”⁵ O my God, such a terrible punishment for a single act of vanity! Who would

¹ Mortui sunt enim Nadab et Abiu, cum offerrent ignem alienum in conspectu Domini in deserto Sinai, absque liberis.—Num. iii. 4.

² Dixitque Samuel ad Saul: Stulte egisti, nec custodisti mandata Domini Dei tui, quæ præcepit tibi. . . . Nequaquam regnum tuum ultra consurget.—I. Kings xiii. 13, 14.

³ Extendit Oza manum ad arcam Dei; quoniam calcitrabant boves, et declinaverunt eam. Iratusque est indignatione Dominus contra Ozam, et percussit eum super temeritate: qui mortuus est ibi juxta arcam Dei.—II. Kings vi. 6-7.

⁴ Trium tibi datur optio, elige unum quod volueris ex his, ut faciam tibi. Aut septem annis veniet tibi fames in terra tua; aut tribus mensibus fugies adversarios tuos, et illi te persequentur: aut certe tribus diebus erit pestilentia in terra tua.—Ibid. xxiv. 12, 13.

⁵ Et mortui sunt ex populo a Dan usque ad Bersabee septuaginta milia virorum.—Ibid. 15.

believe it, if Thou, O God of truth, hadst not revealed it? Who would look on it as just, if Thou, the God of justice and goodness, hadst not inflicted it?

They are still more worthy of punishment in the New Law.

Do you think, my dear brethren, that perhaps now in the New Law such sins are of less account, and not deserving of such severe punishment? Does the Lord think less now than formerly of insults offered His infinite majesty? Does He set more value on the vain goods of the world now, than formerly? Has He more need of our bodily health and temporal well-being than in past times? Are not all men, no matter how great they are, but dust and ashes in His eyes? Have His almighty power, His justice, His holiness, and His supreme sovereignty over all things been lessened? It is true, He does not deal with us now with such manifest and remarkable severity as He did with His people in the Old Law, and that He does not strike us dead on the spot when we offend Him; yet it still remains true that our sins and shortcomings are deserving of equal, nay, of greater punishment, on account of our greater ingratitude, than the same sins would have deserved in the Old Law.

And are actually often severely punished.

Oh, if God were to allow us to look into His inscrutable designs, and there to see the cause of the calamities that sometimes befall us, what dreadful misfortunes we should see inflicted on us as just punishment for sins that appear to us mere daily faults! We should see that often our sensuality is punished by a long illness; inordinate joy and pleasure, by trouble and sadness; self-complacency and vanity, by public shame and confusion; the venial oaths and curses we utter in anger, by thunder and hail storms, that lay waste whole provinces. But we do not think of those things; there is no prophet sent to us now, as formerly, to warn us of the punishment about to overtake us on account of our sins. "Behold the days shall come," said Isaias to king Ezechias, "that all that is in thy house, and that thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried away into Babylon."¹ No prophet, I say, cries out to this vain, idle worldling, who is slothful in the divine service, behold, the days shall come, when you, despised and abandoned by every one, shall sit in your chamber, weeping, as a punishment for your vanity. No prophet calls out to that purse-proud man, behold, the days shall come when your goods will be taken from you by war; when you will lose your credit, authority, and good

¹ Ecce dies venient, et auferentur omnia, quæ in domo tua sunt, et quæ thesaurizaverunt patres tui usque ad diem hanc in Babylonem.—Isa. xxxix. 6.

name before the world; when you will be reduced to poverty; and all this as a punishment of your present pride. No prophet calls out to that passionate woman, who gets angry at the least word of opposition, behold, the days shall come when your husband will die a premature death, and leave you and your children in debt, trouble, and secret poverty, as a punishment of that ill temper, to which you now daily give way in your family. There are no longer any prophets to speak to us in that way; but God, who is inscrutable in His judgments, does not therefore cease to inflict punishment even on sins that appear small, such as curiosity of eyes and ears, impatience and murmuring, idleness and sloth in the divine service, vanity in dress, sensuality in eating, drinking, and sleeping, slight acts of uncharity against our neighbor, and similar vices, that are sometimes all found in the one individual. Confusion, humiliation, persecution, misfortune, poverty, desolation, illness, mental trouble, etc., these are the rods that God often makes use of to punish such sins. What proportion is there between the guilt and its chastisement? Is not the latter too severe for us weak mortals? I acknowledge that I would probably think so, if Thou, my God, didst not inflict the punishment. But, O God of infinite goodness and mercy, since Thou chastisest us far less than our sins deserve, I am driven to the conclusion that even small, venial sins are a grievous evil in Thy sight, and I must acknowledge that for such sins we well deserve to be tried and purified by temporal crosses and tribulations.

Where are you now, Christians, you who dare to murmur and complain that you have too much to suffer, and that you are treated unjustly when you feel the weight of a cross that you imagine to be a heavy one? If any one of you can now venture to say with truth: "Thou hast tried me by fire, and iniquity hath not been found in me," let him come forward. Thou, O Lord, hast sent me this illness, this misfortune, this poverty, this persecution; and yet I do no wrong; I am innocent; I do not deserve such a cross! David would give you your answer, when he speaks thus to his Lord and God: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant; for in Thy sight no man living shall be justified."¹ St. John the Apostle would answer you in his First Epistle: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is

Now, no one is so just as not often to sin venially.

¹ Non intres in iudicium cum servo tuo: quia non justificabitur in conspectu tuo omnis vivens.—Ps. cxlii. 2.

not in us.¹ We sometimes, but, alas, very rarely, find in the world men whose eyes are free from lust, whose hands are not stained by theft and injustice, whose bodies are not sullied by impurity, whose hearts and consciences are not defiled by mortal sin. Job was one of those just men, and he spoke of his innocence to God, when he said: "I have not sinned, and my eye abideth in bitterness."² But that men are so perfectly holy and pure as not to have the least stain of imperfection, and not sometimes to fall into venial sin, who will believe that? Who can dare to boast of such sanctity? I can safely say that there is no just man of that description amongst us. Job himself, that holy servant of God, acknowledges his guilt in this respect: "I have sinned; what shall I do to Thee, O keeper of men?"³ Alas, it is but too true that the just man falls seven times a day! Examine your ordinary daily life; how useless and suspicious your thoughts are sometimes; how inordinate your desires; how rash and obstinate your judgments; how perverse your intentions, and how seldom directed to God; how inconsiderate, false, slanderous, quarrelsome, and discontented your talk; how slothful your works, and how wanting in a supernatural intention; how sensual and often immoderate you are in eating, drinking, and sleeping; how vain in dress; how curious in seeing and hearing; how impatient in suffering; how voluntarily distracted in prayer; how tepid and cold in good works and devotions. Oh! what a number of venial sins and imperfections you will find; and if you examine your conscience properly, you will see that you fall, not like the just man, seven times only, but seventy times seven; and one fall is enough to deserve punishment.

Therefore
there is no
one who
does not de-
serve
crosses.

So that you are not so innocent, after all, as not to deserve that the just God should try you daily by the fire of tribulation and temporal crosses. Do not, then, complain that you have too much to suffer; nor say, with the sorrowing Job: "Oh, that my sins, whereby I have deserved wrath, and the calamity that I suffer, were weighed in a balance. As the sand of the sea this would appear heavier."⁴ For the same answer would be given to you that the Prophet Daniel gave king Balthassar: "Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting;"⁵ you might

¹ Si dixerimus quoniam peccatum non habemus, ipsi nos seducimus, et veritas in nobis non est.—I. John i. 8.

² Non peccavi, et in amaritudinibus moratur oculus meus.—Job xvii. 2.

³ Peccavi, quid faciam tibi, O custos hominum?—Ibid. vii. 20.

⁴ Utinam appenderentur peccata mea, quibus iram merui: et calamitas, quam patior, in statera. Quasi arena maris hæc gravior appareret.—Ibid. vi. 2, 3.

⁵ Appensus es in statera, et inventus es minus habens.—Dan. v. 27.

find that you suffer far too little, and that the sins you have committed are a hundred times heavier than the contradictions you have to endure as a punishment for them. Be satisfied, and bear your trials with patience. Say, with Nehemias: "O Lord God, creator of all things, dreadful and strong, just and merciful, who alone art the good king,"¹ terrible art Thou in the vengeance Thou inflictest even on small faults; powerful in the ways Thou findest out of taking this vengeance! Nevertheless Thou art infinitely just, for Thou dost not impose on me a burden heavier than I can bear, or than I have merited; Thou hast every right to punish me; but I have not the least right nor cause to offend Thee in any way. And besides, with all this, Thou art a God of infinite goodness and mercy; for Thou chastisest me here, as a father does his dear child, so that I may not have to suffer longer and more grievous torments in the next life, and, by the short sufferings of this life, may gain greater joy and glory in Thy kingdom of heaven. Thou art just and merciful. It is therefore right, my dear brethren, that we should often be visited by temporal trials and contradictions; for we deserve it on account of the venial sins and imperfections we are guilty of every day; how much more, then, do we not deserve it on account of the sins we have committed in the past? This we shall see briefly in the

Second Part.

Not every one who is now good and pious has been so always; and there are many who now commit only venial sins, who formerly committed grievous mortal sins, and that, too, perhaps very often. And if you look into your past life, you will probably have to reckon yourself amongst their number, so that, no matter how holy you are now, God has just reason for visiting you with temporal trials. Consider the misfortunes that befell the penitent David. He had already heard the comforting assurance of the Prophet Nathan: "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin; thou shalt not die."² This grace had cost him but a single sigh, "I have sinned against the Lord;"³ and yet, what miseries he had to endure! The sword of the divine wrath was never turned away from his house, as the same Prophet told him: "Therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house, because thou hast

¹ Domine Deus, omnium creator, terribilis et fortis, justus et misericors, qui solus es bonus rex.—II. Mach. i. 24.

² Dominus quoque transtulit peccatum tuum: non morieris.—II. Kings xlii. 13.

³ Peccavi Domino.—Ibid.

despised Me.”¹ One of his sons slew another, in the presence of his other brothers at a feast; another of his sons rebelled against him; a great part of his kingdom revolted, and David himself was forced to fly and to seek refuge with strangers. No doubt, all this was a long and severe trial for such a king. And what was the cause of it all? Nothing but the sins of adultery and murder which he had committed, and which God had forgiven. “My sin is always before me,”² he says himself; my sin persecutes and punishes me. This was the punishment that he could not avert with all his fasting, watching, sighing, and humiliation; this was the punishment to which he humbly submitted.

So also
they who
repent of
their sins
deserve to
be punished
for them.

And this, too, O sinful man, is the punishment which, if you have not yet felt it, is in store for you, on account of your past sins, which you have repented of. You look on your youth as a time for enjoyment, and make little of the sins you then committed, as if the merciful God were disposed to look on them with pity, rather than to punish them in His just anger. The sins you committed some time ago you think no more of now, because you have declared them all in confession, and have repented of them; but wait; the all-knowing God will remember them; the joyous time of youth will pass away, and will be followed by years of sorrow and trouble. In the midst of the good works which you will perform in later years, and while you are leading a pious and holy life, you will feel that the roots of the same sins, that you think you have quite eradicated by penance and confession, are beginning to shoot out again; you will be aware of their unhappy fertility, and will taste the bitter fruit of tears, and trouble of heart, and the fire of tribulation and contradictions; in a word, if you are not punished for those sins in this life, you will certainly be in the next. One or other, my dear brethren, must be our fate. There are few of us, I believe, who are altogether free from trials and crosses; and no wonder; for, how many of us are there whose lives have always been free from sin? Now we sin no longer (and may God grant that to be the case!); but we have sinned in the past. All our sins have been forgiven in confession (ah, if we could only be quite certain of that!); but have we blotted out all the punishment due to them? “Be not without fear about sin forgiven,”³ says the wise Ecclesiasti-

¹ *Quam ob rem non recedet gladius de domo tua usque in sempiternum, eo quod despexeris me.*—II. Kings xii. 10.

² *Peccatum meum contra me est semper.*—Ps. i. 5.

³ *De propitiato peccato noli esse sine metu.*—Eccclus. v. 5.

cus: and why? Because there still remains a considerable debt that must be paid.

To what is he bound who has borrowed money? First, until the capital is paid off, he must pay interest yearly. O sinner, if you have grievously transgressed the divine law, it is, says St. Basil, as if you had signed with your own hand an acknowledgment of your debt.¹ And do you know to what you have bound yourself? To nothing less, if you have committed mortal sin, than to eternal tortures in hell, and that is the amount of your debt. Meanwhile the good God has, after your confession and repentance, lessened this amount and placed it in purgatory: I have explained elsewhere what long and terrible torments must there be undergone, even for one sin. While this amount stands, and until it is fully paid up, the just God demands, during this life, the interest on it, that is, the temporal punishments that the sinner has to suffer by way of satisfaction. Do not wonder, then, if an unexpected and grievous misfortune sometimes comes upon you, nor think to yourself, where does this come from? I have now been for a long time in the state of grace, and, I hope, have served my God with zeal. Yes, that is all right, and it is no more than your duty. But think back a little, and see how you have served God in the past; examine what you have done in your youth, and in your later years; see what you have done here and there at different times. Your Creditor has not forgotten those things; and the trials you now have to endure, and which you, perhaps, do not now deserve, are the interest that the divine justice exacts for the debt you contracted then.

You will find a clear example of this in the Holy Scripture, in the brothers of Joseph, as they lay together in prison in Egypt, and gave way to their grief. What was their fault? They had come, out of filial obedience to their father Jacob, to buy corn during the famine, and were accused of being spies, and were thrown into prison. But they were quite innocent of such a crime; it was the last thing they thought of; and already thirteen years had elapsed since they had sold their innocent brother Joseph, after having treated him so cruelly and cast him into a pit through hatred and envy. See, says St. John Chrysostom, how God finds out everything in His own time, and punishes it. After thirteen years, and while the brothers were engaged in a work of charity and obedience, they were overtaken by the divine justice; they were bound as traitors, and cast into prison, where

Shown by a simile.

And by an example from Scripture.

¹ Est chirographum quoddam adversum nos manibus nostris subscriptum.

they sighed forth: alas, good people, what have we done? why should you treat us thus? You are not to blame now, it is true; but go back in thought, and recall what you did when your innocent brother Joseph came to you in the field, and how you threw him into the pit, without any mercy for him. Alas! that is true, they say: "we deserve to suffer these things, because we have sinned against our brother, seeing the anguish of his soul, when he besought us and we would not hear." He cried out for mercy, but we paid no attention, and sold him into slavery: "therefore is this affliction come upon us."¹

Confirmed
by another
example.

You are doubtless aware of what happened to St. Ephraim. He related the occurrence himself, as abbot, to his brethren in religion (most interesting it is to read this story in the Bollandists:² I will only give you a short extract of what the holy man describes in detail). "When I was still a young man," he says, "I came one day across a cow in the forest, and, out of mere boyish wantonness, pelted the poor animal with stones till it died, and the following night it was devoured by wild beasts. Some months after, I could not go to mind the sheep as usual, and a wolf entered the fold and scattered the flock. I was at once seized and accused of having allowed thieves to enter and steal the sheep; and the shepherds, in spite of all my protestations of innocence, brought me before the judge, who ordered me to be put in prison, where I lay for forty days, with two others, who had also been imprisoned without just reason. At last a young man appeared to me, and said: 'Ephraim, what are you doing here?' 'Sir,' I answered, with a flood of tears, 'I am quite innocent; the shepherds have imprisoned me unjustly.' Whereupon the young man smiled and said: 'I know that you are innocent of the crime of which you are accused; but I know, too, what you did some time ago, when you killed a poor man's cow. Learn now that God is a just Lord, and that He is now punishing you for that sin; and in order to see His justice all the clearer, ask your two companions in prison, who have also been accused of a crime of which they are innocent, ask them what evil they have done in their past lives.' Whereupon the young man disappeared. The next morning I asked my fellow-prisoners why they were arrested. 'I,' answered one, 'have been accused of murder; but I am not guilty of it in the least.' 'And I,' said the other,

¹ Merito hæc patimur, quia peccavimus in fratrem nostrum; videntes angustiam animæ illius, dum deprecaretur nos, et non audivimus: ideo venit super nos ista tribulatio. — Gen. xlii. 21.

² Bolland. in Act. SS. die 1 Feb.

‘am here for an act of adultery of which I know nothing.’ ‘But,’ I asked further, ‘what sins have you committed in your past lives?’ ‘I will tell you candidly,’ said the first; ‘some time ago I saw a man throwing another into a river from a bridge; I could have saved the drowning man by merely stretching out my hand to him; but I did not take the trouble to do so, although he cried out to me for help, and I went my way and let him drown; that was my sin, and I now see that the just God allows me to be punished for it by permitting me to be imprisoned, although innocent.’ ‘Two years ago,’ said the other, ‘there were two brothers, who on the death of their parents tried to exclude their sister from her share of the inheritance, on the pretext that she had been living in adultery and impurity; they asked me to confirm that accusation, and I, for the sake of getting money from them, took a false oath; I see now that God is punishing me as I deserve.’ Thus we all adored the wonderful decrees of God. Not long after the two prisoners were set at liberty by the judge, their innocence being fully established; but I was still kept chained in prison for forty days longer. During that time three other criminals were brought in, in whose company I remained for thirty days. Again the young man appeared to me, and said; ‘do you know now, Ephraim, what you have done? and do you see that God knows how to punish sin in His own good time? These three last companions of yours are in similar circumstances to yourself; for they are imprisoned for crimes of which they are innocent, yet none of them is so innocent as not to deserve death. Two of them are the brothers who falsely accused their sister of adultery, and deprived her of her share of the inheritance; the third is he who pushed the man from the bridge into the water, as your former companions told you.’ He again vanished and left me filled with dread and anguish. When my three companions had confessed their guilt, and were condemned to the scaffold, I became quite downhearted, not knowing how the affair would end for me, when the same young man appeared to me a third time. ‘Ah sir,’ said I to him, with a deep sigh, ‘how long, then, must I remain in prison?’ ‘Ephraim,’ replied he, ‘remember the cow you killed. You should have been more cautious, and put some restraint on your wantonness; but be comforted, in twenty days’ time you will be released;’ and his promise was fulfilled. Immediately after, according to a promise I had made in prison, I entered the religious state.” So far St. Ephraim.

Humble acknowledgment that we deserve trials.

What are we to think of this, my dear brethren? What can or should we say to our God, when we are unexpectedly overtaken by some misfortune? Must we not, like St. Ephraim, when we consider our past lives, acknowledge that the judgments of God are right and just, and say, with Joseph's brothers, "we deserve to suffer these things, because we have sinned against our brother"? Alas, yes, O Lord, I have sinned, and sinned often; and not alone venially, which would be bad enough, but mortally as well. I have sinned against Jesus, my Brother, Thy only begotten Son! I have despised His inspirations and graces! I have given Him up for a vile pleasure, for some worthless thing! I have ruthlessly trampled His blood under foot. "We deserve to suffer these things;" with justice, O Lord, and I cannot deny it, is this calamity come upon me! Alas, what did I do on that occasion, in that place, in that company! My soul, my eternal salvation, Thou, my God, were worth nothing to me then! I imagined that a good confession would make everything completely right again; but now I feel Thy chastising hand, now I find in Thee a Judge who takes vengeance on me for the past. Be Thy name blessed, O Lord; Thou dealest with me as I deserve; nay, far more mercifully than I deserve. "We deserve to suffer these things;" justly do I now groan under this pain and sickness; for I have often misused my health against Thy holy will. "We deserve to suffer these things;" justly am I now overwhelmed with confusion; for I have formerly, in my pride, despised others. "We deserve to suffer these things;" justly has this misfortune come upon me, this poverty overtaken me; for I have been so vain, so intemperate, and have lived so extravagantly. "We deserve to suffer these things;" justly am I now persecuted by others, for I have often sinned against the love of my neighbor. "We deserve to suffer these things;" justly am I now in trouble and desolation; for while I was in good circumstances, I was slothful in Thy service, and attended only to my sensuality, according to the vain customs of the world. "We deserve to suffer these things;" justly do I now burn in the fire of tribulation; for in my past life I have been guilty of many sins. Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgments are right and holy. I will never complain again, or else I will complain of my wickedness alone, which is the sole cause of my sufferings. I will humbly resign myself, take up my cross daily, deplore nothing so much as my sins, and devote all my care to avoiding sin, although I have to groan under the weight of tribulation. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the Second Sunday after Easter.

Text.

Ego sum pastor bonus, et cognosco meas.—John x. 14.

“I am the good Shepherd, and I know Mine.”

Introduction.

But how is that? If Jesus Christ is such a good Shepherd that He knows His just sheep, who try to follow every sign of His; if He is such a loving Shepherd that He gave up His life for them; if He is so merciful and generous that He looks after them continually, lest any harm should befall them, or they should want proper nourishment; how comes it, then, that He so often seems to abandon them and leave them to weep and moan in sorrow and tribulation, without coming to their help? How are we to explain that? We can easily understand that sinners, who do not wish to amend their lives, and who wilfully abandon their Shepherd, should be visited with crosses and trials; for they deserve it, and must receive their trials as blessings and graces, which will compel them to enter into themselves and be converted. But that even just souls, who are not conscious of any grievous sin, and who do their best to fulfil the will of God as well as they know how, that they, too, should have grievous contradictions to suffer, is what we find a difficulty in understanding. Such is sometimes the current of our thoughts, my dear brethren, and we think we are treated unjustly when God visits us with temporal afflictions. What evil have I done, we say, that the hand of the Lord should weigh so heavily on me? I have long since amended my life. But the decrees of the divine wisdom are far different from what we imagine. Even if we had never done any wrong in our whole lives, we still should have no reason to complain of being treated unjustly by being visited with trials in this vale of tears; for even the innocent, by a just judgment of God, have to bear the punishment of the sins of others. Still, that you may see how unjustly and—*continues as above.*

On the holy Sacrifice of the Mass as an Infinite Satisfaction for the Punishment Due to Sin, see the following Fourth Part.

ON THE GRATITUDE WE OWE TO GOD AFTER DOING PENANCE.

FORTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE APPRECIATION OF THE BENEFIT RECEIVED BY PENANCE.

Subject.

The forgiveness of sin is one of the greatest benefits we receive from God. 1. It is great in itself; 2. It is great in the manner in which God bestows it on us; and therefore we owe to God a special debt of gratitude for it.—*Preached on the twentieth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Filius tuus vivit: et credidit ipse et domus ejus tota.—John iv. 53.

“Thy son liveth; and himself believed and his whole house.”

Introduction.

Nothing more did this man require than to hear the words, “thy son liveth,” thy son, who was at the point of death, is now alive and well; this was the whole benefit that his prayer had obtained from Jesus Christ: “and himself believed and his whole house,” and, without doubt, he persevered in the faith. How comes it, my dear brethren, that similar and even far greater benefits are daily conferred on us—for there are probably few among us who have not experienced during their lives such wonderful effects of the divine goodness—and yet we hardly think anything of them? For, whenever one is absolved from mortal sin in sacramental confession, God says to him, “thy soul,” that was dead, “liveth.” That benefit, which is almost the greatest of all, is the one for which we least of all return thanks to God, because we do not value it as we ought. To-day I shall try to

show the greatness of it, that all who have experienced it may be always grateful to God. I repeat, then, that—

Plan of Discourse.

The awakening of the soul from death, or the forgiveness of sin, is one of the greatest benefits bestowed on us by God; such is the whole subject of this sermon. It is great in itself, as I shall show in the first part. It is great in the manner in which God bestows it on us, as I shall show in the second part. Therefore he who has sinned grievously and obtained forgiveness owes a special debt of gratitude to God; such shall be the conclusion.

Grant us Thy grace, O God of goodness, to fulfil it; this we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

He who wishes to appreciate truly what a great benefit it is to recover the health of the body should go back in thought, and remember what he had to endure in his illness; and when he compares that with the agreeable change and the bodily comfort he now experiences, he will be forced to cry out, in the joy of his heart, infinite thanks be to the good God! What a great benefit He has bestowed on me, in raising me up from my bed of suffering, and restoring me to health! In the same way, to see the greatness of the benefit we receive in the forgiveness of our sins, we need only remember the unhappy state of our souls while we were living in sin, and compare it with the wonderful and happy change wrought by the grace of repentance and sacramental absolution. From both these circumstances we can reasonably conclude that the forgiveness of sin must in truth be an extraordinarily great benefit, for which, once we have received it, we can never be grateful enough to the good God during our whole lives.

The greatness of the benefit of the forgiveness of sin must be gathered from the unhappy state in which the sinner was, and the happy one to which he is raised.

And now, justified soul, who have even once during your life offended God by mortal sin, have you ever considered what you were before, and what you are now? To have some idea of both these states, come with me in imagination to the court of Constantinople, and see what happened there in former times. Michael Balbus, an illustrious prince and minister of the emperor Leo, was accused and found guilty of having conspired against the emperor. He was thrown into prison and was condemned to be burnt alive, as a punishment of his treason. It happened to

Both states are explained by an example from history, by way of simile.

he Christmas time as he was led out to execution, and the empress Theodosia, seeing the miserable state of the unhappy prince, and influenced, too, by a feeling of reverence for the holy season, fell at the emperor's feet, and earnestly besought him not to sully the great festival by such a horrible tragedy. Leo was displeased at her request, but consented to put off the execution till after the festival. What happened? The night before the day on which the guilty man was to be led out again and burned alive Leo died, and Michael Balbus was brought forth from prison and proclaimed emperor; and as they could not find the keys to unlock the chains with which he was bound, they placed him on the throne fettered as he was, and on the following day he was solemnly crowned in the church of St. Sophia. What a wonderful change that was for him! From a prison to a throne, from fetters to a crown, from the fire, in which he was on the point of being burnt alive, to the highest glory of the empire. Who, my dear brethren, could describe the joy of that prince at such a sudden and miraculous change of fortune? Could he ever have been sufficiently grateful to him who was the cause of it. But, great as was his good fortune, it is but a shadow compared to that of the human soul, which is freed by grace from the state of sin, and again received by God into favor.

**The sinner
was before
in a very
unhappy
state.**

Think, O penitent sinner, of what you were. By the sanctifying grace you received in baptism you were made a prince and an heir of the kingdom of heaven, an intimate friend of the sovereign God; but when you rebelled against God, that is, when you, for any reason whatever, consented to mortal sin, into what a deplorable and unhappy state you fell! Your beautiful soul, so much loved by God, became in an instant a hideous monster in the sight of heaven, and more disgusting than any foul carrion can be in the sight of men on earth; as a rebel, guilty of high treason, it became the captive of the devil, and lost its dignity as child and friend of God; it was deprived of all the merits and supernatural graces that you had gained by all your good works during your life; it forfeited all claim to heaven, and sentence of everlasting damnation to the fire of hell had already been pronounced against it; it was on the point of being sent to hell, where it would have suffered forever, without hope of release. Can any more deplorable or lamentable state be imagined? All that God, whom you had offended, and who was so angry with you, had to do, was to turn away His eyes

from you, and allow you to go to destruction; for there was no heaven any longer for your poor soul. Hell had already opened its jaws, and was ready to swallow you up at any moment as an eternal holocaust; death was commanded, perhaps, on the very day on which you sinned, to carry the sentence into execution; you were actually on your way to the stake, for every hour of your life brought you nearer to death and to hell. Who put off the execution? Who prevented the sentence that was pronounced against you from being carried out? No one but the merciful God, who looked on you with eyes of pity, and persuaded His own enraged justice to give you a little more time. "Unless the Lord had been my helper," you may well say, with thankful heart, like the penitent David, "my soul had almost dwelt in hell."¹ The good God forestalled you with His grace, and touched your heart, softening it, so that you repented of your sins, confessed them, and received absolution.

Now see what a great and sudden change took place in you at the moment when you were absolved by the priest. What idea have you of the great good fortune that was then your lot? Shall I say that you were delivered from temporal death, brought out of a foul prison to be placed on a throne, and freed from fetters to be adorned with a diadem, like Michael Balbus? Ah, that would not half describe your good fortune! After having loosed the bonds in which the foul fiend kept you enslaved, the good God generously clothed you with the costly robe of sanctifying grace, adorned you with His divine gifts and supernatural virtues, and restored to you all the merits you had gained when you were in the state of grace; you are placed, so to speak, on the divine throne, as a beloved child of God and a lawful heir of the kingdom of heaven, to whom the crown of honor and glory belongs as a right, that you may reign with God forever. O miracle of goodness, wonderful change, divine state! such is the exclamation of St. Augustine in considering it: "Pardon is given to the sinner, and the Holy Ghost, too, along with the hope of justification, and charity, and love, in which he may do all good things; and besides all this, eternal life will be his portion."² Human soul, how did you feel when this wonderful change was wrought in you? How were you able to contain yourself for sudden joy? Is it possible that you could ever forget

From which God has raised him to the happiest state on earth.

¹ Nisi quia Dominus adjuvit me, paulo minus habitasset in inferno anima mea.—Ps. xciii. 17.

² Data est venia peccatori; datus est Spiritus, et spes justificationis; data est charitas et dilectio, in qua omnia bona faciat; et super hæc dabit et vitam æternam.—St. Aug. in Ps. cxliv.

such a great benefit? Is it possible that you do not acknowledge and openly confess that you are eternally bound to your God, and that you owe Him a debt of the greatest gratitude therefor? With what jubilation and festivity great princes celebrate their birth-day, in honor of their first appearance in the world. What honor, praise, and thanksgiving, then, should not you and I offer to our good God, on that day on which, by the holy sacrament of penance, we have been raised from the death of sin to the life of grace?

The forgiveness of sin is a greater benefit than creation.

Our creation is, as we must acknowledge, a great benefit on the part of God, since, in preference to countless creatures, which He has left to their nothingness, He has drawn us forth from nothing and given us this temporal life; but what is it compared to the goodness by which He has rescued our souls, which were dead in sin, from the jaws of hell, and restored them to eternal life? By the temporal life of the body God has opened to us the door to the transitory goods of this earth, which are accompanied by many annoyances and contradictions; but with the spiritual life of the soul He has again opened to us the door to eternal, heavenly goods, which will never have an end, after that door had been closed on us by our sins. This consideration so touched the heart of the penitent king David, that he made the firm resolution of spending the rest of his life in praising and blessing God: "For Thy mercy is better than lives: Thee my lips shall praise;"¹ that is, the mercy Thou hast shown to me, such a great sinner, far surpasses all other life, and therefore my lips shall praise Thee unceasingly: "Thus will I bless Thee all my life long: and in Thy name I will lift up my hands."²

And as great as redemption.

What do we not owe Jesus Christ, my dear brethren, for the inestimable grace of redemption? For He, the great Son of the eternal God, for our sake, and in order to save us from hell, to which we were on the point of being condemned forever, descended from the throne of His heavenly glory, became man like us, spent thirty-three years in poverty, and finally sacrificed Himself for us completely, dying the bitter death of the cross. If we had a hundred thousand lives at our disposal, and gave them all up to Him out of gratitude, we should still fail to make Him an adequate return; and yet this redemption was but a means to the forgiveness of sin, without which the offended

¹ Quoniam melior est misericordia tua super vitas: labia mea laudabunt te.—Ps. lxxi. 4.

² Sic benedicam te in vita mea, et in nomine tuo levabo manus meas.—Ibid. 5.

justice of God could not have been fully satisfied for even one mortal sin. The justification of the sinner was the chief end of that redemption, which cost the innocent Son of God so much that, in order to accomplish it according to the will of His heavenly Father, He had to suffer and die. "Who was delivered up for our sins," says St. Paul to the Romans, "and rose again for our justification."¹ Therefore, if the merciful God forgives me even one mortal sin, when I have done penance for it, He has conferred on me a benefit for which I owe Him as much gratitude as for that wonderful and exceeding great benefit which I have received from the Son of God, who suffered and died on the cross for me.

Further, in order to see the full magnitude of this effect of the divine goodness, read the holy Gospel, and there you will find that Jesus Christ, Our Saviour, makes more account of the conversion of one sinner, than of raising the dead, or of all the other miracles He wrought during His life on earth. Mark, my dear brethren, that, after He had raised from the dead Lazarus, who had been already four days in the grave, with one word, "Lazarus, come forth,"² He allowed him at once to go away: "Loose him and let him go."³ When He raised the son of the widow of Naim, "He gave him to his mother."⁴ As we read in to-day's gospel, He raised the ruler's son without even deigning to go into his house, although He was implored to do so. "Go thy way," He said to the father, "thy son liveth."⁵ On the other hand, when He cast an eye of mercy on the sinner Matthew, whose heart He had softened and converted to penance, He did not say, "go way," but, "follow Me," I wish to have you with Me. When He converted the public sinner Zachæus, He said: "Make haste and come down; for this day I must abide in thy house," and eat and drink with thee: "this day is salvation come to this house. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."⁶ These words He never spoke when He raised the dead or healed the sick.

Is much more to be prized than all the miracles of Our Lord.

What is the reason of this difference, my dear brethren? Why did Our Lord make companions of converted sinners, while He

For in the conversion of the sin-

¹ Qui traditus est propter delicta nostra, et resurrexit propter justificationem nostram.—Rom. iv. 25.

² Lazare, veni foras.—John xi. 43.

³ Solvite eum et sinite abire.—Ibid. 44.

⁴ Dedit illum matri suæ.—Luke vii. 15.

⁵ Vade, filius tuus vivit.—John iv. 46.

⁶ Festinans descende, quia hodie in domo tua oportet me manere . . . Hodie salus domui huic facta est . . . Venit enim filius hominis quærere et salvum facere quod perierat.—Luke xix. 5, 9, 10.

ner Christ
shows His
power and
glory more
than in all
His mir-
acles.

allowed those whom He raised from the dead, or healed, to go away from Him? One might reasonably imagine that He would rather keep constantly at His side, and bring with Him everywhere, those whom He had raised from the dead; for they were a living proof of His almighty power before the people. True; but God derives far more honor and glory from the soul that He raises from the grave of sin than from the body that He restores to temporal life; for, as St. Augustine says, in the conversion and justification of the sinner He shows to the world, not only His goodness and mercy, but also His infinite and divine omnipotence, and that, too, far more than in the raising of the dead; since a dead body cannot resist His will, He can do with it what He pleases; but a sinner, whose soul is dead, has full liberty, either to obey divine grace or to resist it, and therefore often opposes His holy will. Hence God must, so to speak, use more artifice and power in order to win the sinner's heart and convert him to Himself; consequently, says St. Augustine, "the triumph of the Lord is the justification of the sinner."¹

As we see in
the case of
the penitent
thief.

Jesus Christ, dying on the cross, wished to give the world at the last moment of His life a clear proof of His divinity. What was it? The Pharisees and the rabble, standing around, were crying out with mocking laughter: "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross;"² then we will believe that Thou art really God, as Thou sayest. The high-priests and Scribes, too, mocked Him in the same way: "If He be the king of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him."³ Ah, cries out St. John Chrysostom, unable to contain himself at the consideration of these words, ah, blind people, blind synagogue, do you now seek for another miracle in order to believe that Jesus Christ is really the Son of God? Have you not seen with your own eyes the dead whom He has raised to life, the blind whom He has made to see, the deaf whom He has made to hear, the cripples, the lepers, the countless sick people whom He has healed in a moment? What more do you want? But wait a little; on the cross itself, on which you see Him hanging, He will now work another miracle, which will be a still greater and more wonderful proof of His divinity than all the other miracles He wrought during His life. Look at the thief, who is crucified at His right hand; he was a murderer and robber during his life, who had often deserved the pains of hell; and now, in a moment,

¹ Magnificencia Domini est peccatoris justificatio.

² Si filius Dei es, descende de cruce.—Matt. xxvii. 40.

³ Si rex Israel est, descendat nunc de cruce, et credimus ei.—Ibid. 42.

he will be changed and converted from a ravening wolf into a meek lamb, from a wicked sinner into a saint, from a blasphemer into a champion of the honor and innocence of Christ. Full of sorrow and repentance for his past sins, he prays in your presence to this Man, who is crucified with him, as to God, and protests before heaven and earth that he wishes to share in His kingdom. "Lord," he sighs forth, "remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom."¹ "Oh," exclaims St. Augustine, "this conversion of the thief is the change of the right hand of the Most High."² It is a miracle which far excels all the others. And St. John Chrysostom agrees with him: "Our Lord was pleased to change the thief's perverse heart suddenly, and to excite it to penance, so as to give an undoubted proof of His Godhead."³ To change a hideous demon into a beautiful angel, a bond-slave of the devil into a child of God, that is, to convert a wicked sinner, and, after he has done penance, to receive him again into the state of grace, that, indeed, is a change of the right hand of the Most High. So that the forgiveness of sin and the receiving of the sinner again into His friendship is a benefit for the accomplishment of which God requires His almighty power. And how often, O man, has not that benefit been bestowed on you and me? What a debt of gratitude, then, do we not owe the merciful God? If we wish to see our obligation still more clearly, let us consider the manner in which He confers this benefit on us.

Second Part.

It is not every one who has it in his power to do good to others; and what better am I, if he who can help me has not the will to do so? It is far more creditable to do good in reality: yet we have in the Gospel an instance of one doing good against his will, in the man who, conquered by the importunity of his neighbor, gets out of his bed at night to give him the required three loaves of bread. The best and most excellent quality of a benefit is the willingness and readiness with which it is conferred, so that the benefactor rejoices and is pleased at being able to do a favor to another. A service that is obtained only by dint of hard begging is not valued much by the world, and still less by the almighty God. Hence the Apostle St. Paul warns us,

Readiness and willingness on the part of the benefactor enhances the benefit.

¹ Domine, memento mei cum veneris in regnum tuum.—Luke xxiii. 42.

² Hæc mutatio latronis dexteræ Excelsi est.

³ Latronis mentem aversam voluit commutare, ut ex omni parte ejus divinitas sentiretur.

"Every one as he hath determined in his heart, not with sadness, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."¹

God forgives sin with the greatest readiness and willingness.

And that, my dear brethren, is the very circumstance which renders still more excellent the benefit of the forgiveness of sin, great and wonderful as it is in itself. For the merciful God bestows it with the utmost willingness and readiness. It is the source of the greatest joy and exultation to Him if the sinner is only willing to accept it; and, in fact, He rejoices more therein, than in giving His other graces to His beloved children, to innocent and pious souls, as we learn from the testimony of Christ Himself in the Gospel of St. Luke. After having described the joy of the shepherd who has found the lost sheep, He adds: "I say to you that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance."² Therefore the justification of the sinner is ascribed by the Council of Trent to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Ghost; and hence the prayer of the Church which the priest says at the altar: "may the Holy Ghost renew our hearts, for He is the remission of all sins."³ Not as if the Father and the Son did not also forgive sins, but in order to show the greatness of the loving tenderness with which God forgives the sins of him who truly repents; for the Holy Ghost is the mutual love of the Father and the Son.

And that, too, as soon as the sinner wishes.

He confers this benefit on every sinner who earnestly desires it, no matter how numerous and grievous his sins are. No one who implores that grace is rejected by Him, as long as life lasts; never does the sinner come too late to receive forgiveness. Jesus Christ, Our Saviour, was pleased to leave us a loving proof of that immediately after His death, according to St. Augustine. "One of the soldiers with a spear opened His side,"⁴ as we read in the Gospel of St. John. Why was His side opened? Did the soldiers, perhaps, wish to assure themselves of His death, by thrusting a lance through His heart? No, for they knew already that He was dead: "But after they were come to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs;"⁵ "but one of the soldiers with a spear opened His

¹ Unusquisque prout destinavit in corde suo, non ex tristitia, aut ex necessitate: hilarem enim datorem diligit Deus.—II. Cor. ix. 7.

² Dico vobis quod ita gaudium erit in cœlo super uno peccatore poenitentiam agente, quam super nonaginta novem justis, qui non indigent poenitentia.—Luke xv. 7.

³ Spiritus sanctus reparet mentes nostras, quia ipse est remissio omnium peccatorum.

⁴ Unus militum lancea latus ejus aperuit.—John xix. 34.

⁵ Ad Jesum autem cum venissent, ut viderunt eum jam mortuum, non fregerunt ejus crura.—Ibid. 33.

side." Perhaps Our Lord wished thereby to signify to us His desire to suffer still more for us? No, for a dead body has no feeling, and cannot suffer. What, then, is the meaning of the mystery? There is a great difference, my dear brethren, between a wound inflicted on a living body, and that which is inflicted on a corpse. For in the living body the wound closes again in time, while no medicine or care can close the wound of a dead body. Now, the wound in the Heart of Jesus is the ever open door, always ready to admit penitent sinners, and therefore Christ wished to receive it, not while He was still living, but after the life had left His body, so that it could never be healed, and that all sinners might at all times find the door of mercy and forgiveness open to them.

Finally, God bestows this great benefit before the sinner asks for it, nay, before he even thinks of it. For God must always first move the sinner by His inspirations, in order to enable the latter to desire and ask for the grace of repentance and forgiveness. We have a beautiful example of this in the Acts of the Apostles. As St. Peter and St. John went to the temple one day, they saw sitting before the gate a man who had been a cripple from his birth. "He, when he had seen Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked to receive an alms."¹ He knew well, says St. John Chrysostom, that they were disciples of Christ, and that they had the power of working miracles; nevertheless, he did not ask them to heal him; such a thought never entered his head. He was suffering a twofold trial, poverty and lameness; and, no doubt, the latter was worse than the former, for it is better to be poor than to be a cripple. Should he not, then, have first begged to be freed from the greater evil? Certainly, if he had acted reasonably, but he did not think of that, as he was used to his lameness. Yet he got what he did not ask for, for Peter said to him: "Silver and gold I have none, but what I have I give thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk; and he, leaping up, stood and walked."² What a sudden joy filled his heart at the great and unexpected benefit he received, instead of the trifling alms he had asked for. "He went with them into the temple, walking and leaping, and praising God."³ Sinner, look back on the past; did not the same

Nay, even before he thinks of it, God offers him that benefit.

¹ Is cum vidisset Petrum et Joannem incipientes introire in templum, rogabat ut elemosynam acciperet.—Acts iii. 3.

² Argentum et aurum non est mihi; quod autem habeo, hoc tibi do: in nomine Jesu Christi Nazareni, surge et ambula; et exsiliens stetit et ambulabat.—Ibid. 6.

³ Intravit cum illis in templum, ambulans, et exsiliens, et laudans Deum.—Ibid. 8.

thing happen to you, as to this cripple? When you were still in the state of sin, what was the end of your desires and wishes? Ah, you were begging for a worthless alms from some creature, for a miserable and momentary carnal pleasure, for the vain esteem and good opinion of men, for some wretched gain, or for the satisfaction of your passion for this or that person. Such was your whole aim; such were the desires of your heart. And how was it, meanwhile, with your poor soul? The most important thing for you was to see that it was restored to health, freed from the miserable state in which it was, saved from hell, and placed on the right road to heaven. But you never even thought of that; your vicious habits had made you insensible to such things. Many and many a time you went into the church without feeling the least wish to ask God for the grace of repentance and conversion; nay, perhaps you studiously avoided hearing the word of God in sermons, lest your bad conscience should get alarmed and make you uneasy. You did not wish to be freed from your secret malady, for you were determined to continue in sin; nor did you dread anything so much as that the occasion of sin might desert you, that the person with whom you were indulging your unlawful passions might die or go away from you. And while your soul was actually in that state, the good and merciful God thought of your salvation, and had in readiness for you the wonderful benefit of forgiveness. The unforeseen good inspiration, the recollection of what you had heard in a sermon, the sickness that suddenly attacked you, the premature death of some dear friend, was the fore-stalling grace and the beginning of your conversion, by which God drew you to Himself, until, by true repentance, He healed your soul from its sins, rescued you from the slavery of the devil, placed you again among the number of His children, and made you an heir of the kingdom of heaven. O unequalled benefit! again exclaims St. Augustine, O infinite mercy! "Thou didst not forget us, although we forgot Thee."¹ Thou hast proffered us that great benefit even before we thought of asking it of Thee.

The sinner receives that great benefit, as it were, for nothing. Shown by an example.

And what did God ask from us in return? The strict and long-continued penance of a St. Macarius? The constant fasting of a St. Antony? The hair-cloth and the scourgings of a St. Mary Magdalene? No; He was fully satisfied with a penitent sigh, "I have sinned, I am sorry for what I have done;" with the candid confession of our misdeeds to a man like ourselves in

¹ Nos oblitus non es, cum nos oblitus te fuimus.

the confessional; that was enough to induce Him to remit the guilt of our sins and the eternal punishment due to them. Hear, my dear brethren, and you especially, O sinner, who are perhaps cast down by the thought of the number of your sins, and are beginning to lose confidence in God, a remarkable occurrence that happened to a young woman, whose happy conversion is described by Cardinal James de Vitry, and also by Julius Mazarinus, as a well known fact. One cannot relate without shuddering the fearful crimes committed by this person. She entered on her wicked career by sacrificing her purity, and after that she was guilty of a twofold horrible murder. She poisoned her mother, and with her own hand cut off her father's head, for the sole reason that her parents reproached her for the wicked life she was leading. After having committed those horrible crimes, she took the best of the furniture from her home, and went away into a foreign country, where she gave herself up to a most dissolute life, forgetting God, His saints, and heaven. She had, in fact, made up her mind to go into eternal torments, and as she despaired of her salvation, she determined to deny herself no pleasure that this world could give her, since she had no hope for the next. While in this miserable state, she happened to enter a church, impelled thereto, doubtless, by her guardian angel, and, as it happened, a zealous preacher was occupied in explaining the infinite mercy of God. The poor sinner listened and heard the preacher say that there is no sin, no number of sins, no vice, so abominable, that the good God is not ready to pardon, provided that He is only humbly asked for that grace with a contrite heart, and that no man, no matter who he is, has reason to despair, for, even if he is buried in the filth of sin, he can still obtain eternal glory as long as he is in this life. These words planted the first seeds of hope in the heart of the sinful woman; but still she could hardly persuade herself that it was possible for the great and infinite God, whom she had so often and so grievously offended, to forgive her her sins and admit her to eternal happiness. Therefore, when the sermon was over, she went to the preacher, and asked him if all that he had said in the pulpit of the mercy of God was true. "Certainly," answered the priest, "there is not the least doubt of it." "And," she continued, "will God be ready to pardon me, and to give me His grace, although there is no greater sinner on earth than I am?" "By all means," was the answer; "God is always ready to do that." "Alas," she sighed out then,

“how could I have offended such a good God?” And thereupon she was filled with a lively impression of the divine mercy, and saw clearly that, for His mercy alone, God is worthy of infinite love. This thought inspired her with a deep sorrow, so that she was unable to contain herself, and burst out into sighs and tears. She confessed all her sins, and kept on crying out: “O my God, Thou art so good, and I am so ungrateful; Thou art so full of love, and I am so presumptuous; Thou wast ready to give me heaven, although I have deserved a thousand times to be buried in the depths of hell.” Thus she wept, beat her breast, and interrupted her confession by frequent and fervent acts of contrition. After having received absolution, she was unable to leave the church, for her sorrow was so great that, after having made another act of contrition, she fell dead on the ground. When her confessor heard of her sudden death, he asked his brethren in religion to pray and offer up the holy sacrifice for her soul. And behold, as they were all assembled together for that purpose, a loud voice was heard from heaven, speaking these words: “You need not pray for her, she will rather pray for you.”¹ By these words God gave them to understand that He had forgiven not only the guilt of her sins, but had also remitted all the temporal punishment due to them.

The penitent sinner, then, owes the greatest gratitude to God.

What must have been the sentiments of that soul, my dear brethren, on its first entry into heaven, after such a short penance, and after having despaired to such an extent as to look on hell as its portion forever? Oh, what praise and thanks it must have given the divine mercy! Sinners, may we not all cry out with David, “What shall I render to the Lord?”² What return can we make Him for having so often and with such readiness and willingness pardoned our sins after a short repentance on our part? Should we not leap for joy, like the lame man, and praise the divine goodness? St. Peter Damian tells us that some merchants, who were sailing on the Adriatic, once landed on an island, where they saw a lion entangled in the coils of a dragon so firmly that he could not move, nor do anything to save himself from death. The merchants, pitying the poor beast, took their swords and cut the dragon into pieces, so that the lion was able to free himself. Wonderful was the effect that gratitude for such a benefit had even on an unreasoning animal! As long as the merchants remained on the island, the lion brought them

¹ Non est opus ut oretis pro ipsa, potius ipsa orabit pro vobis.

² Quid retribuam Domino?—Ps. cxv. 12.

every day the skin of some rare animal as a present. Ah, how he puts to shame my ingratitude, and that of many others! We must acknowledge, O sinner, that, when we were in the unhappy state of sin, we were in the power of the hellish serpent, and were delivered over to eternal death. To whom do we owe our freedom, since we could not free ourselves by our own strength? And who has so often freed us? Who else but the infinitely good and merciful God? And now we can rejoice and say, with the penitent David: "Our soul hath been delivered as a sparrow out of the snare of the fowls. The snare is broken and we are delivered."¹ "What shall I render to the Lord?" What return shall we make our benefactor? Tell me, O sinner. I ask myself and you, too, if the just God had, as He had every right to do, taken you out of the world immediately after you had committed the last mortal sin, how many years would now have elapsed since your death? Nay, how many months, or days, perhaps? But let them be few or many, your poor soul would now be in hell, without any hope of release. Is not that the case? Now suppose, what will never be the case with any lost soul, that the merciful God had recalled you to life, and saved you from eternal torments, promising at the same time to bring you to heaven with Himself, if you would serve Him truly for a short time here on earth, how would you act towards your God? What gratitude would you not owe Him? Now, is it not precisely the same benefit He bestows on us, when He forgives our sins? For it comes to the same thing in the end. Nay, the latter is even a greater benefit, for He does not condemn us to hell, as we have deserved, but forgives us without sending us there.

O my God of infinite goodness and mercy, what do I not owe Thee? What return can I make Thee? That of never offending Thee again? But that is no better than robbers and murderers do, who spare the lives of those whom they get into their power. No, O God of love, that is too small a return for me to make. What, then, shall I do? Love Thee with all my heart? Yes, that is all I can do for Thee; and that I am determined to do, as long as I live on this earth. I will love Thee, my sovereign Benefactor, with my whole heart, above all things; with this love I will thank Thee daily for having so often forgiven my sins; and through this love I will always do Thy holy will to the best of my ability. "The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever."²

Conclusion
and resolution
to be
always
grateful to
so good a
God.

¹ Anima nostra sicut passer erepta est de laqueo venantium: laqueus contritus est, et nos liberati sumus.—Ps. cxxiii. 7.

² Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo.—Ps. lxxxviii. 2.

FORTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

**ON THE GOODNESS OF GOD TOWARDS THE PENITENT, AFTER
THE LATTER HAS BEEN CONVERTED.**

Subject.

After the conversion of the sinner, 1. God forgets forever all his sins; 2. and promises him His friendship and still more abundant graces.—*Preached on the third Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Hic peccatores recipit, et manducat cum illis.—Luke xv. 2.
“This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

Introduction.

If I had lived in the time of Our Lord, and had not then been a sinner, as I now am, for I acknowledge publicly that I am in the greatest need of the sovereign mercy of God, I should perhaps have murmured with the Pharisees, and shown how displeased I was to see Christ so intimate with notorious sinners. At least, I should have said to myself, what is the meaning of this? If the Lord is so merciful and so ready to forgive, He ought to wait till sinners humble themselves and repent, before receiving them. Why does He make so much of them? There is no necessity for Him to go into their houses, to seek them out everywhere, to eat and drink with them. “This man receiveth sinners;” that is excusable; but He “eateth with them,” too. How can we explain that? Is not that protecting, encouraging, and, as it were, supporting impiety? So I would perhaps have thought at the time. But now I thank Thee, O God of infinite, incomprehensible mercy; and if Thy mercy were not so great, what would have become of me long ago? Infinite thanks do I give, O God, for Thy mercy, which I cannot sufficiently praise, but which I will never cease praising, blessing, and declaring. My dear brethren, I have already spoken of this mercy, and have shown how great it is to the sinner while the latter is actually in the state of sin, and how wonderfully great it is to the repentant sinner. We have still one more point to consider; and that is the surprising goodness and mercy of God to the sinner who has done penance; and that will be the subject of

this sermon, to the eternal praise and glory of the divine mercy, and for the consolation of all those who have offended God grievously and have repented. St. Augustine supplies me with the division of my sermon; "when sinners are converted," he says, "the past is forgotten, and future rewards are promised."¹

Plan of Discourse.

God forgets forever all sins that have been committed; a wonderful effect of His goodness, as we shall see in the first part. He promises the sinner His favor and friendship and still more copious graces; a still more wonderful effect of His goodness, as will be explained in the second part. Innocent and pious souls, continue in your innocence. Sinners who are still in the state of sin, begin at once to repent. And all you others, who have already done penance for your sins, be all the more diligent in serving and loving, above all things, such a good, merciful, and loving God. Such shall be the conclusion.

Give us all, O merciful Saviour, the grace to practise it; we ask it of Thee through the Mother of mercy and through the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

To speak according to our way of thinking, it is a matter of surprise that the great God, who is not at all in need of our service, and who is perfectly happy in Himself, should by any possibility look with an eye of favor on him who has offended Him by mortal sin, even after the sinner has done penance. What labor and trouble it costs to reconcile two men who have been bitter enemies! And even when they are outwardly reconciled, and have given each other the hand in sign of friendship, and assured each other of forgiveness, yet it is very difficult to restore their former friendship and to establish a mutual confidence between them. Some secret spite will still remain in their hearts and will show itself now and then, notwithstanding all their protestations of friendship. And no wonder; for, as iron, when it has been cleaned, easily contracts its former stain of rust, and as a smouldering fire-brand easily bursts forth into a flame, so in the hearts of those who have once been hostile to each other there still remain the smouldering embers of their former hatred, even after they have been reconciled. At all events, grievous offences are seldom so completely forgotten that the recollection of them does not now and then cause a feeling of bitterness to arise in the heart. I appeal to all of you in testimony of the truth of this.

It is hard for men to forget an injury altogether.

¹ Quandocunque conversi fuerint, præterita obliviscitur, futura promittit.

And therefore the most difficult part of the Christian law, which the pagans thought it impossible to fulfil, is that which commands us to forgive our enemies from our hearts, to do good to them, and to love them; and that is a law which every Christian who wishes to save his soul must observe, according to the example and express command of Our Lord Jesus Christ: "But I say to you, love your enemies; do good to them that hate you."¹

Hence, they who do so are seldom to be found and are worthy of admiration.

The world wonders at men who fulfil this command exactly, as if they had performed a miracle. If we wish to extol the greatness of David's character, we do not represent him in his shepherd's cloak, with a sling in his hand, conquering the giant Goliath; nor slaying with his own hand the lion and the bear that attacked his flock; but we go in thought to the cave in which he had in his power Saul, his sworn enemy, who was actually then persecuting him, and who had already inflicted countless injuries on him, whom, nevertheless, he allowed to go scot-free, without doing him the least harm. And if we wish to show his greatness in a still stronger light, we represent him as forgetting the injuries he had received so completely, that when he heard of the death of his enemy Saul, he wept with grief, and rent his garments, and caused the messenger, who had brought him the sad news, and who thought to gain his favor thereby, to be put to death. Yet, as long as Saul was alive, David never ventured to appear in his presence, although Saul, with tears in his eyes, had promised to be his friend. Meek as David was, and readily as he forgave the insolence of Semei, who had insulted him, yet he could not forget the insult, and when he was on his death-bed (doubtless through a divine inspiration, that the sin of Semei might not go unpunished), he commanded his son Solomon, amongst other things, not to forget, when he came into power, to avenge him on Semei. There is, said he, a man named Semei, "who cursed me with a grievous curse, when I went to the camp . . . and I swore to him by the Lord, saying: I will not kill thee with the sword;" but when I am dead, do not allow his wickedness to go unpunished: "Do not thou hold him guiltless. But thou art a wise man, and knowest what to do with him, and thou shalt bring down his gray hairs with blood to the grave."²

¹ Ego autem dico vobis: diligite inimicos vestros; benefacite his qui oderunt vos.—Matt. v. 44.

² Qui maledixit mihi maledictione pessima, quando ibam ad castra: juravi ei per Dominum, dicens: non te interficiam gladio: tu noli pati eum esse innoxium. Vir autem sapiens es, ut scias quae facies ei, deducesque canos ejus cum sanguine ad inferos.—III. Kings ii. 8, 9.

So rare and difficult a thing it is, my dear brethren, completely to forget and pardon a grievous injury. And true, too, are the words of St. Augustine, "men never pardon fully,"¹ although they are offended by one like themselves.

O great God, how far more gracious and good Thou art to us ! After repentance, God forgets even the greatest injuries forever, as completely as if they never had been offered Him.

How much more ready to forgive, and how much more complete is Thy forgiveness! I, a poor worm of the earth, may have dared to rebel against Thee, my sovereign Lord; I may have despised Thee to Thy very face, trampled Thy law under foot, and said to Thee, "I will not serve;" I will not do what Thou hast commanded; I may have done that ten, twenty, a hundred, a thousand, nay, many thousand times, until my sins have surpassed in number the hairs of my head; although Thou hast never given me the least cause to offend Thee; although hevery moment of my life I have enjoyed Thy benefits, and have had cause to love Thee above all things with my whole heart. After I had treated Thee so unbecomingly, hadst Thou not just reason to cast me away from Thy sight forever, and to hate me as Thy irreconcilable enemy? Certainly, O Lord, I acknowledge it. If I had offered a mere mortal the tenth, the twentieth, the fiftieth part of the injuries I have offered Thee, I would never have the least hope of again recovering his favor. And Thou (O good God, who could believe it, if I and many others had not had experience of it?), Thou, O God, who in Thy infinite wisdom must necessarily know all things at once, from whom nothing can be concealed, when, after having insulted Thee in countless ways and most grievously, I sigh forth for a morment from the depths of my heart, "I have sinned; I am sorry for what I have done;" and make also a firm resolution of confessing my sins, Thou receivest me again as fully into Thy friendship and love as if I had never offended Thee in the least; I again become Thy dear child, as I was when I was still innocent; nor have I any reason to fear that Thou wilt remember my presumption, or reproach me with my ingratitude, or withdraw Thy favor from me on account of it. Nay, I need not fear that Thou wilt ever remember my sins for all eternity; everything is as completely forgotten and buried as if it had never existed.

I cannot, O Lord, see into Thy heart and Thy memory; but Thou hast assured me of this on Thy own infallible word, not in one merely, but in many passages of Thy Holy Scripture; so that I cannot doubt the truth of it without being untrue to Thee

Shown from Scripture.

¹ *Apud homines nunquam plena est indulgentia.*

and to my faith. "He will have mercy on us," Thou assurest us by Thy Prophet Michaëas; "He will put away our iniquities, and He will cast all our sins into the bottom of the sea,"¹ like a heavy stone, so that they will never more come to the surface. "I have blotted out thy iniquities as a cloud, and thy sins as a mist,"² Thou sayest by Thy Prophet Isaias; Thou destroyest sins as a cloud is dissipated by the heat of the sun. "Give praise, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath shown mercy."³ "I will bring them back again, because I will have mercy on them," are Thy words to me by the Prophet Zachary; "and they shall be as they were when I had not cast them off . . . and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: and their children shall see and shall rejoice, and their hearts shall be joyful in the Lord, and I will multiply them as they were multiplied before,"⁴ in order to show that I do not bear the least enmity towards them on account of their past sins. Still clearer dost Thou speak by the Prophet Ezechiel: "But if the wicked do penance for all his sins, which he hath committed, I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done."⁵

He never
upbraids
the sinner
with sins
repented of.

And in fact, my dear brethren, if you read the Holy Scripture, you will find countless examples of sinners whom the Almighty has forgiven the most grievous sins, on their doing penance. In some cases you will see that, after having forgiven the guilt of sin, the Lord has sent temporal calamities and afflictions, in order to help the sinner to satisfy in this life for what he owed the divine justice; but you will not be able to point out a single instance in which the good God ever reproached a sinner with the sins He had forgiven. Magdalene was buried in sin, and was a public sinner; Matthew was a usurer; Peter denied his Master; Thomas was an obstinate unbeliever, as you may see in the New Testament; but did Christ, after having forgiven them, ever utter the least reproach on account of their former transgressions? No; not the slightest sign of displeasure ever escaped His lips on that account. And when our meek

¹ Miserebitur nostri; deponet iniquitates nostras, et proficiet in profundum maris omnia peccata nostra.—Mich. vii. 19.

² Delevi ut nubem iniquitates tuas, et quasi nebulam peccata tua.—Isa. xlii. 22.

³ Laudate coeli; quoniam misericordiam fecit Dominus.—Ibid. 23.

⁴ Convertam eos, quia miserebor eorum; et erunt, sicut fuerunt, quando non projeceram eos: et lætabitur cor eorum, quasi a vino; et filii eorum videbunt, et lætabuntur, et exultabit cor eorum in Domino. Et multiplicabo eos, sicut ante fuerant multiplicati.—Zach. x. 6, 7, 8.

⁵ Si autem implus egerit poenitentiam ab omnibus peccatis suis quæ operatus est . . . omnium iniquitatum ejus, quas operatus est, non recordabor.—Ezech. xviii. 21, 22.

Lord wished to reprove the city of Jerusalem, what words did He use? "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," He sighed, "thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee."¹ And had not many prophets been slain in Jerusalem, before Our Lord's time? Certainly. Why, then, did He not say: "thou who hast killed the prophets, and still dost continue to kill them? No, says a certain author; Our Lord did not wish to say anything of past misdeeds, in order to show that what He has once forgiven is forgiven forever and forgotten. And therefore theologians teach that if a man falls into sin, after doing penance, and is lost forever, the sins of which he repented will not be reckoned against him. "I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done."

Yes; instead of secret spite and displeasure on account of my past sins, there arises in the divine heart a joy and satisfaction on my account, all the greater in proportion to the number and malice of my sins. Nor does this require any proof. To-day's gospel makes it clear enough. How the shepherd rejoiced when he found the lost sheep and brought it home on his shoulders! How the woman exulted after having found the groat she had lost! And in order to show their joy, they both called in their neighbors, and said to them: "Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep, the groat which I had lost." "And I say to you," adds Our Lord, "that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance." I can easily understand the reason of this, my dear brethren, if I do not look at the matter according to the usual way of the world; for the world judges far differently of such things; the more grievous the offence, the more bitter and inveterate the hatred it gives rise to. But when I consider the examples of the saints I can understand to a certain extent how the almighty God rejoices at the conversion of the sinner. For I read of zealous missionaries undergoing the greatest privations and labors, in the midst of relentless persecutions, deprived of the very necessities of life, and yet filled with heavenly joy and consolation at the conversion of even one sinner. St. Francis Xavier, St. Bernardine of Siena, and St. Vincent Ferrer used to shed tears of joy when in the confessional; they called it a paradise, on account of the great consolation and almost sensible delight they experienced in it, when great sinners came to repent of and confess their sins.

Nay, He is all the more rejoiced at the conversion of the sinner.

¹ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, quæ occidis prophetas, et lapidas eos qui ad te missi sunt.—Matt. xxiii. 37.

Our holy founder, St. Ignatius, commanded all the members of the Society whom he sent on missions to write every month to him an account of the number of sinners they converted, of the confessions they heard, and of the heretics and infidels whom they brought to the true faith. He used to read those letters with a glowing countenance, his eyes filled with tears, and they caused him such joy that he could not sleep the whole night after having read them. And when I remember what joy and consolation I myself have experienced, whenever I have had the happiness of giving absolution to a great and repentant sinner, I come to the following conclusion: missionaries, parochial clergy, preachers, and confessors are, after all, but instruments that the almighty God makes use of for the conversion of sinners; and if they feel such an indescribable joy when great sinners return to God, what joy and consolation must not Jesus Christ Himself have? For it is He who is the chief cause of their conversion; He it is who has shed His precious Blood for their souls, and has purchased them by His death on the cross; He it is who calls them His sheep, His brothers and sisters, His dear children, His crown and glory. Truly, there will be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance. And therefore Christ fills His instruments and helpers in the conversion of sinners with a heavenly joy, just as the shepherd in the Gospel calls in his friends to rejoice with him.

And for this reason alone sinners should repent.

O sinner, see how loving the great God is, although He is not at all in need of your service, and you act so ungratefully towards Him. Provided only you repent sincerely, He is ready to forget the insults you have offered Him, and to change His anger into joy and gladness, although, if you are insulted by a man like yourself, it costs you an effort to forgive him. Should not this incomprehensible meekness and goodness of God move you to speedy repentance and amendment of your vicious life? But there is another circumstance, that is still more to be wondered at. Not only does the great God forget forever all your sins after you have repented of them; not only does He lay aside all hatred and anger against you on their account; not only does He rejoice with His angels in heaven at your return; but, in addition to all that, He will take more care of you in future, give you more copious graces, and show you more love and favor, as I shall prove in the

Second Part.

When a physician has succeeded in curing his patient, the more dangerous the latter's illness has been, the more careful is the physician in future. He often visits the convalescent man, asks about his health, and if there is the least thing wrong with him he employs every means that his art supplies him with to restore him to perfect health, while his favorite topic of conversation is the successful cure he has accomplished. Why so? Because his fame and reputation are much increased by the skill he has shown in a difficult case, so that the sick man can say, after God, I owe my recovery to the doctor, who rescued me almost from the jaws of death. A gardener acts in the same way. If he succeeds in bringing round a plant or a tree that was wholly unproductive, and was almost dried up, he sets more store by it than by all the other trees in the garden; he goes to it every day; looks at it; prunes it; waters it, as if his whole business was to care for that tree alone, while every visitor that comes to the garden he brings to look at it; see, he says to them, that tree has cost me trouble enough to make it worth anything; a short time ago no one would have given a farthing for it, and now, see what a fine tree it is! Thus every one is inclined to set a high value on that which has cost him a good deal of trouble.

What costs much trouble to procure is highly valued. Shown by similes.

What was the sinner, my dear brethren, before he did penance? A sick man, nay, as far as his soul was concerned, a dead man, who was on the very brink of hell; he was an unfruitful, withered, worthless tree, that could only bring forth bad and corrupt fruit; he was one of those of whom St. John the Baptist said to the Pharisees: "For now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that doth not yield good fruit, shall be cut down and cast into the fire."¹ Now the sick man is restored to health; the tree is in full blossom; but what labor and skill the almighty God had to employ before he brought matters to such a pitch! How many inspirations it took; how many exhortations, and interior warnings. How the Lord was forced to disturb the sinner's conscience either by Himself, or by His angels, or preachers and confessors, before bringing him to see the unhappy state in which he was, so as to induce him to repent. Can we imagine that God would be satisfied to spend such an amount of trouble and labor in vain, or that it is a matter of indifference to Him what is the result of

God values the penitent highly, because his conversion cost so much.

¹ Jam enim securis ad radicem arborum posita est. Omnis ergo arbor, quæ non facit fructum bonum, excidetur, et in ignem mittetur. — Matt iii. 10.

it? I rather think that He would place His glory in pointing to and preserving such a wonderful work of His mercy and power; for, as Tertullian says, "He will value more highly him whom He has won with great trouble."¹ He will help him by more copious graces, and strengthen and protect him in temptations, that he may not fall so easily into sin. He will make him more careful and humble by the knowledge of his weakness, and will urge him to greater zeal by the recollection of his past sins. "It frequently happens," says St. Gregory, "that they who were formerly great sinners, when they become converted to God by sincere repentance, are much more zealous in the divine service, and become holier than many others who never lost their innocence."²

And regards him with as much favor and love, as He does the innocent.

With regard to the special favor and love that God shows towards such sinners, we rarely find anything like it amongst men. A father is always more affectionate to the child who has always been obedient and dutiful than to one who has been the source of trouble and annoyance to him. The sovereign shows more favor to those of his subjects who have always been loyal, than to those who have been rebellious; the latter he constantly keeps in subjection. "But it is not so with Our Lord and God," continues St. Gregory; "even the greatest sinner, if, after his conversion, he loves God with a love equal to that with which one who has been always innocent loves Him, will receive from God the same love, grace, and friendship in return, as He bestows on one who has never grievously offended him. He receives penitents as He does the just;"³ and He gives His gifts and graces to the one as to the other.

Shown by examples.

If we compare those saints who were always innocent with those who were formerly sinners we shall see at once that such is the case. Josue, a just and innocent man, was able to command the sun to stand still, in order that he might finish the overthrow of his enemies, and, as the Holy Scripture says, God obeyed the voice of man: "And the sun and the moon stood still till the people revenged themselves of their enemies. . . . So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down the space of one day . . . the Lord obeying the voice of a man."⁴ Certainly a great favor on the part of God towards

¹ *Carliorem sentiet, quem lucrifecit.*

² *Sæpe ferventiores poenitentes innocetibus.*

³ *Sic recipit poenitentes sicut justos.*

⁴ *Steteruntque sol et luna, donec ulcisceretur gens de inimicis suis. Stetit itaque sol in medio cœli, et non festinavit occumbere spatio unius diei: obediante Domino voci hominis.*
—Jos. x. 13, 14.

His faithful servant. But open, ye deserts, and show us a murderer and highway robber, to whom God showed the same favor, after he had done penance for his sins and become a saint. This was Mutius, at whose command the sun also stood still, and that, too, under far less important circumstances than the victory of Josue, for he wished to reach, before sunset, the place to which his superior had sent him. The innocent and holy Elias had the rain, as it were, at his command; the elements were bound to obey him; but not less was the power of James the Hermit, who had committed a horrible sin in the desert, and then killed his accomplice. The innocent Daniel walked about among the fierce lions, as if they were tame dogs; but William of Aquitaine, who had been a persecutor and profaner of the Church of God, had equal command over wild beasts. If I am surprised that the innocent and holy Apostle St. John came unhurt out of the caldron of boiling oil, I am still more astonished to find St. Boniface, a penitent sinner, performing just the same miracle. How often did not Mary of Egypt, that notorious and public sinner, walk on the water after her conversion, like the innocent St. Raymond? She lived for many years without taking any nourishment, like the innocent Catherine of Siena. Time does not permit me to bring forward other similar examples of saints. Thus God receives penitent sinners as He does the just, and fulfils the promise He makes by the prophet Ezechiel: "The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him, in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness."¹ O sinner, what a consolation for you and me, provided only we have a good will to be true to such a good God!

But what am I saying? I am placing innocent and penitent saints on the same level. And yet I find that there are not a few of the latter who have enjoyed the favor and grace of God in a far higher degree than the former. Who was appointed by Jesus Christ as the chief of His apostles and His Vicar on earth? Was it the innocent James or John? By no means; he who was appointed to that office was one who three times denied his Lord with an oath. Was not Paul, who was before an enemy and persecutor of Jesus Christ, that chosen vessel of God, who did more than any one else to spread God's honor and glory among the Gentiles, and convert souls? In the same way, it was not John, he that stood faithfully at the foot of the cross

Nay, generally He gives them more graces than to the innocent.

¹ *Impietas impii non nocebit ei, in quacumque die conversus fuerit ab impietate sua.*—Ezech. xxxiii. 12.

until Our Lord's death, who first among the disciples had the happiness and consolation of seeing Our Lord after His resurrection, but Peter, who had reason to weep so bitterly for his sin. Not Martha, but the penitent Mary Magdalene sat at the feet of Christ and heard His salutary doctrine; and she is the only woman mentioned in the holy Scripture to whom He appeared after His resurrection. And what wonderful graces God bestowed on St. Augustine, who had before been such a great sinner! And what good does He not still do in His Church by men whom He has drawn out of the mire; that is, by those whom, if we could see into their consciences, we should find to have committed many a grievous sin in their past lives.

Shown by
an exam-
ple.

Father Ambrose Cataneus of our Society, in his book called "Eternal Principles," relates the following incident of a sinner: A priest had been imprisoned in Castile, who was accused of the most enormous crimes, and was a very monster of wickedness of all sorts. Besides being a renegade from two religious Orders, he had been also the notorious leader and chief mover in the commission of certain crimes that cry to heaven for vengeance. While he was in prison he heard from a Jesuit priest who had come to see him of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, and got the idea into his head that it would be a good thing to see what they were like. He began at once, and the first meditation inspired him with such a horror of himself and of the sins he had committed, that he was completely taken up with the idea of doing penance and amending his life. Acting on the sudden zeal he had thus conceived, he put on a rough hair-shirt, scourged himself to blood every night, fasted on bread and water, and made a general confession of his whole life, shedding copious tears all the while. He made, moreover, the firm resolution not to do anything to evade the punishment he had so richly merited at the hands of human justice, nor to try to lessen it; for he knew well that, however painful or disgraceful the death he had to undergo, it would not be more than he had deserved. Truly, a most surprising grace for such a sinner to receive! But the goodness of God was not content with this; He was not satisfied with giving him the grace to repent in such a wonderful manner, but He even made use of him to convert others. The penitent sinner persevered in his pious exercises for the remaining months he spent in prison, and, besides, he preached every day most zealously to the other prisoners, as well as to the jailors; and at last, by his example and preaching, he

changed the prison into a house of prayer, so that nothing was heard therein but rosaries, litanies, and other prayers, which the prisoners said or sang in choir. The blasphemies and curses that used to form the morning and evening devotions of the place, were heard no longer. When the news of the conversion of a man who was so generally known and execrated became public in the town, many of the principal inhabitants visited the prison, in order to see this miracle of grace, and to hear this new St. Paul preaching in chains. And they all went away with tears of contrition in their eyes, and their hearts full of sorrow for their sins. In a word, the change that took place in that penitent was great and so complete that the judge came to the resolution of sparing his life, and appointing him chaplain to the prison; but the penitent priest, when he heard this, begged as earnestly that he should be degraded from his sacred office and put to a shameful death, as others would beg to be freed from a similar punishment. Finally the judge sent him to the galleys, that he might be of service to those who were sentenced to that punishment; and there the penitent was seized by such a virulent fever, that it carried him off in a few days. Thus one of the worst criminals the world ever saw died a most holy death, like one of those great saints who spend their lives in the service of God, and he left this world, shedding tears of contrition, with a cheerful countenance, an easy conscience, and sending up aspirations of love and desire to God and heaven. "But," some one asked him, as he lay on his death-bed, "do not your former sins make you uneasy?" "Not at all," he answered; "for I have laid them all on the shoulders of our dear Lord." "Does not the devil tempt you severely?" "Certainly, he does, but my God is with me, He comforts and protects me, so that I have nothing to fear." "And do you think, then, that you will go to heaven?" "I firmly hope and trust to see my God there; the penitent thief gained heaven; he is my patron after Christ and my Mother Mary, for I was like to him in wickedness, and likely enough I surpassed him." Thus, amid the greatest consolations and the most zealous practice of the highest virtues, this former apostate and monster of vice, who in a few days had been transformed from a sinner into a saint, departed peacefully out of this world. Could any innocent servant of God have expected greater graces during life, or more consolation at the hour of death?

But, O my God, cannot, then, Thy faithful and innocent ser- The tone-

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vants have a holy envy at seeing that Thou givest more grace and showest more favor and love, so to speak, to sinners, than to them? Might they not complain, like the son in the Gospel, when he saw his prodigal brother so well received by his father on his return? What is the meaning of this? he said to himself, full of indignation: "And he was angry, and would not go in. Behold, for so many years do I serve thee, and I have never transgressed thy commandment, and yet thou hast never given me a kid to make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son is come, who hath devoured his substance with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." Every one is rejoicing at the return of the undutiful son. Is that right? But no, O good God, I do not complain of Thy mercy to sinners; if I did, I should injure my own interests! And you, too, pious, just, and innocent souls, you must be satisfied also, and should rather praise the infinite goodness and mercy of God, who is ready to receive even the worst sinner, and to save him from hell. And for that very reason you should continue to serve in your state of innocence your God, who is so worthy of love. One day you will be amongst those beloved children of His, to whom He will say, to their eternal consolation, what the father of the prodigal said to his discontented son: "Son, thou art always with me, and all I have is thine." Thou hast always served Me faithfully, and therefore My heaven and all its joys shall be thine forever.

Conclusion
and exhor-
tation to
sinners to
repent at
once.

But you, O sinners, who have perhaps been frightened from doing penance by the number and magnitude of your sins, what are your thoughts when you consider this mercy of God? Ah, I exhort you in the words of the Wise Man: "Think of the Lord in goodness, and seek Him in simplicity of heart." Let your thoughts of Him be such as are becoming His infinite goodness and mercy. Even if you have all the sins of the world on your conscience, approach with confidence, do not let fear or shame keep you back; His arms are always open to receive you as His dear children, and to treat you with all the more love and goodness, as you were more ungrateful and wicked towards Him in the past. Sinners, no matter how hard-hearted

¹ Indignatus est autem, et nolebat introire. Ecce tot annis servio tibi, et nunquam mandatum tuum præterivi, et nunquam dedisti mihi hædum, ut cum amicis meis epularer. Sed postquam filius tuus hic, qui devoravit substantiam suam cum meretricibus, venit, occidisti illi vitulum saginatum. — Luke xv. 29-30.

² Fili, tu semper mecum es, et omnia mea tua sunt. — Ibid. 31.

³ Sentite de Domino in bonitate, et in simplicitate cordis querite illum. — Wisd. i. 1.

you are, if any such are here present, does not the consideration of this wonderful mercy of God soften your hearts, and move you to repent? How unjustly and ungratefully you would act if you still continued to sin, simply because God is so good and so ready to receive you if you repent. It is looked on as infamous to insult one because he will not defend himself, but rather return good for evil. But woe to you if you abuse the goodness of God too long, and so change His patience into anger! Therefore do not delay repentance. "To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts." 1

And last of all, you penitent souls, for whom this sermon is chiefly intended, you who must acknowledge in your hearts that you have often grievously offended your God, but that now, through His goodness and mercy, you are freed from the miserable state of sin and are reckoned amongst the number of His children, when you think of how matters stand with you, you must confess that God has been as good and loving towards you as if you had never provoked His anger in the least, and therefore you must not forget the gratitude, honor, and love you owe your most merciful God. For, does He not deserve that you should be so careful in His service in future, that you will never more offend Him by the least sin? Does He not deserve that you should serve Him all the more zealously till the end of your lives, the more you acknowledge that you have offended Him in the past? I am not surprised that Magdalene wept almost continually for thirty years, although she had no reason to doubt that her sins were forgiven. I am not astonished that St. Peter could hardly be consoled, whenever he remembered his denial of his Master, although he was certain that his sin was remitted by Our Lord. Truly, the thought that one has ever been unfaithful to such a good God, who is ready to receive the penitent with fatherly kindness, and so completely to forget the injuries offered Him, that the only revenge He takes is to bestow still more benefits on the offender, this thought should soften even the hardest heart, and move it to love. And I, O Lord, am one of the hard-hearted! I have spoken in order to convince others of the greatness of Thy mercy, and I have spoken in Thy name, who wishest Thy mercy to be exalted and praised above all Thy works. As for myself, I should not require so many words to prove to myself that Thou art merciful; for I know it by experience, and I still feel the effects of it every day. Thou, O Lord,

To repent-
ant sinners
to serve God
more zeal-
ously.

1: *Hodie, si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra.*—Ps. xciv. 8.

knowest how I have acted towards Thee. I have experienced and still experience the great graces and favors Thou bestowest even on one who has offended Thee so often. Shall I not, then, love thee, O God of meekness and goodness? Shall I not serve Thee with my whole heart? Certainly, if I did not, I should deserve a thousand hells. Therefore I will love Thee, O my God, and will constantly praise Thee to my last breath. "The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever." Amen.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost.

Text.

Reddite ergo quæ sunt Dei, Deo.—Matt. xxii. 21.

"Render therefore to God the things that are God's."

Introduction.

Must we then, O Lord, give to Thee what is Thine? Truly, it will not take us long to find out what belongs to Thee! For, body and soul and all that we have is Thine. We are literally composed of benefits, which we receive from Thy liberal and merciful hands every moment of our lives. As to the goods of nature, Thou hast created us out of nothing, and kept us in life by Thy almighty power. As to the goods of grace, Thou hast cleansed us in holy baptism from the sin in which we were born, and hast adopted us as Thy children. And when we, by the sins we committed, treated Thee most contemptuously, and rejected that first grace, Thy mercy has again received us in the sacrament of penance to Thy favor and friendship. But what is most wonderful of all, Thou still continuest to enrich us with countless benefits, as if we had never done the least thing to displease Thee. O my Lord and my God, what are we to think of Thee? If we have to render to Thee the things that are Thine, then we must say in all humility, here I am, O Lord, body and soul; for all I have is Thine. Such is the case, my dear brethren; everything we have is a benefit we receive from God. On a future occasion we shall speak more at length of the countless benefits that God has bestowed on us; and I have already explained how good God is to pardon us our sins so often in the sacrament of penance and to re-admit us to His grace. Now I shall call your attention to the still more wonderful goodness that God shows us after we have done penance and have been converted to Him; to the eternal praise and glory, etc.—*Continues as above.*

FORTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON CONSTANT SORROW FOR OUR PAST SINS.

Subject.

With good reason should our sorrow for sin last our whole lives.—*Preached on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul.*

Text.

Tibi dabo claves regni cælorum.—Matt. xvi. 19.

“I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

Introduction.

A rich man who entrusts the care of his property to another and gives him over the keys of his room and coffers, is very careful in the selection of the person in whom he reposes such confidence; not even for half a day would any one give his keys to an utter stranger, through a well-grounded fear that the latter might betray him. He must be one whose honesty is well-known, so that his master can safely rely on him. My dear brethren, Jesus Christ, before dying for us men, sought out among His apostles one whom He was to make His plenipotentiary on earth, to whom He was to entrust all His property, that is, the Church founded by Him, and to whom He was to give the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that he might open it to men, or shut it against them, according to circumstances. And whom did He make choice of? Peter was elected to that office in preference to all the others: “I say to thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.” But, I ask, was Peter the right man for that office? Could Our Lord rely sufficiently on his fidelity? Did He not know beforehand, by His infinite wisdom, how Peter would act; how shamefully he would deny Him three times with an oath? Was that a proof of fidelity on his part? Would not John, the beloved disciple, have been better fitted for such an office? For he, as Our Lord foreknew, was to follow his divine Master faithfully even to the cross, and publicly to testify his fidelity at the

very foot of the cross. No; Peter was the chosen one. "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." It is true that Our Lord knew that Peter would deny Him three times; but He also knew that he would repent most sincerely, and would shed bitter tears for the sin he thus committed; nay, that during his whole life, whenever he heard the cock crow, his tears would flow in remembrance of his denial. And so, thought Our Lord, if Peter will be once unfaithful to Me, and sin thereby, he will rise again, do penance, and serve Me with all the more zeal in future. Therefore, Peter, "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." From this, my dear brethren, we can derive three lessons of the greatest advantage to our souls: one, to our consolation and encouragement, as far as our past lives are concerned; another, to our instruction, as far as the present is concerned; and a third, to teach us how to act in future. In the first place, Christ chose Peter as His vicar on earth, although He foresaw his grievous fall. From which we can learn the wonderful goodness and mercy of God towards the penitent sinner, against whom He not only bears no hatred on account of past sins, but whom He even enriches with more copious graces and marks of His favor. What a great consolation for us, if we have sinned grievously in the past, and have done penance! In the second place, Peter sinned, but at a look from Christ he saw his fault and at once did penance for it: "And going forth he wept bitterly."¹ Sinners, who have imitated Peter in grievously offending your God, imitate him also in his penance; repent of your sins and confess them at once, and that, too, this very day; do not wait till to-morrow. Finally, Peter wept for his sin, not only once, but even after Christ had assured him of forgiveness; whenever he thought of what he had done, he wept bitterly, even to the last day of his life. From this we must all learn not to be satisfied with repenting of our sins once merely; but, after the example of St. Peter, to be sorry for them our whole lives long. And it is this last point which I now wish to develop, to the honor of the holy prince of the apostles and to the salvation of our souls.

Plan of Discourse.

With good reason should our sorrow for sin last our whole lives. Such is the whole subject of to-day's sermon. In the conclusion,

¹ Et egressus foras, flevit amare.—Matt. xxvi. 75.

we shall see how to keep up this sorrow with little trouble, and to the consolation of our souls.

Christ Jesus, we beg of Thee, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels, to urge all penitent Christians thereto by Thy grace.

He who has met with a great misfortune, that has reduced him to a state of misery, is not satisfied with the tears and complaints with which he has bewailed his condition; his sorrow lasts as long as his misery, and is renewed as often as he remembers the unfortunate occasion of it; and that goes on until he is completely freed from it, especially if it has been brought on by his own fault. For instance, a rich merchant has through his own negligence incurred a considerable loss, which reduces himself and his family to poverty. A mother, in a fit of passion, beats her beloved child so severely, that it becomes lame and is a cripple. Both these people never cease bewailing, the one, his carelessness, the other, her anger. When his wife and children cry out for bread, alas, thinks the merchant, with sorrow at his heart, what have I done? I am the cause of this poverty. We were so well off before, and had everything in abundance; now I am hardly able to buy enough bread to keep me and mine from starving. Accursed be my sloth! Why did I not look after my affairs better? Whenever the mother sees the lame child trying to hobble about on crutches, alas, she sighs, her heart pierced with sorrow, I am the cause of my poor child's misery! I have treated him so cruelly that he is now unable to walk. Wretch that I am! why did I not conquer my anger? Both are inconsolable, nor will they cease bewailing their state, until the child is healed, and the merchant has recovered what he has lost; and even then the remembrance of the misery they brought on themselves will still cause them sorrow. Is not that so, my dear brethren?

He who has fallen into misery through his own fault is filled with regret whenever he thinks of it.

Now, O man, if you have committed even one sin by a wilful bad desire during your whole life, have you ever maturely considered what you have done, and into what a miserable, lamentable and unhappy state you have plunged yourself of your own free will? You have in a moment, as far as the matter depended on yourself, forfeited all your treasures and riches, all the gifts, graces, and merits that you had hitherto gained. You have, in order to satisfy your evil desire, not only lamed and crippled your own beloved son, that is, your precious, immortal

He who sins mortally plunges himself wilfully into the greatest miserv.

soul, redeemed by the blood of Christ; but you have actually murdered it, and condemned it to eternal death among the demons in hell. I will say nothing more now of the other manifold injuries you have done yourself. Ah, unhappy man, what have you done? Where are your tears, when you think of it? Where are your contrition, and sorrow, and repentance? If you wept tears of blood, would it be too much for you to do? Nay, would it be enough, when you recall your perversity and the harm it has done you?

And is not
sure that his
sins are for-
given.

But, you think, I have settled all that already; I have told my sins in confession and performed the penance enjoined on me, so that everything is in good order again; the fire of hell is as good as extinguished, as far as I am concerned; my soul is again living; I have recovered all my losses; I am again a dear child of God and a lawful heir of the kingdom of heaven. Ah, if you only could be sure of that! Has any one given you a document to prove it? You know very well that you have sinned grievously; but are you equally certain that God has forgiven you? You remember what a mistake Joab and Semei made in imagining that David had forgiven them? Joab was guilty of having treacherously murdered two princes, Amasa and Abner, and, besides, he struck three lances through the heart of Absalom, the unhappy son of David, in spite of David's earnest warnings to spare his life. But as he had been able to render some important services to David after committing that crime, he thought that the king would forget what he had done, and forgive him for it. Semei had also grossly offended David by throwing stones at and insulting him. Some time after, when the latter returned to Jerusalem, Semei came to him and helped him to cross the Jordan, as a reward for which service the king spared his life and left him at liberty. And the king said to Semei: "Thou shalt not die."¹ This made Semei think that he had nothing more to fear on account of his former misdeeds. But both he and Joab were grievously mistaken. A few years later, in accordance with the dying injunction of David to his son Solomon, they were both put to death; and when they heard their sentence pronounced, they saw too late that they had deceived themselves in imagining that they had been fully pardoned. If they had believed that they were still in disgrace, they would doubtless have endeavored to appease the king's anger by doing zealous service for him, and gaining powerful

¹ Ait rex Semei: non morieris.—II. Kings xix. 23.

patrons to intercede for them. But as they falsely imagined they were still in favor, they neglected all these precautions, and at last lost their lives in consequence. This, O sinner, is a lively figure of what may happen to you, if you try to persuade yourself that the great King of heaven has fully pardoned and restored you to favor, and do not think any more of your past sins. You have repented of those sins and confessed them, and the priest has given you absolution, you say. I quite agree, and it is an article of faith that true sorrow, with the sacrament of penance, takes away all mortal sins, no matter how manifold and grievous they are, through the divine mercy in consideration of the infinite merits of Jesus Christ ; but, tell me, who has assured you that the sorrow you then had was a true sorrow? Who has told you that your contrition then was real, supernatural, and that it extended to all your sins ; that it was a sorrow greater than you would feel for any other evil, and that it embraced all your future life by an earnest resolution rather to undergo any calamity, and even death itself, under any circumstances whatever, than ever to offend God by a mortal sin in any way? But that is the sorrow you must have in order to receive the grace of repentance and to obtain forgiveness of your sins. Therefore I ask, who has assured you that, when you went to confession, the absolution you received was valid, that your soul was restored to life, and that the losses you had suffered by the lamentable state in which you were, were made good? Now, if you have not an infallible certainty of that—and you cannot have it unless by divine revelation—how can you imagine that you are no longer under the necessity of being sorry for your past sins, and that you need not trouble yourself any further about them?

O ye holy, penitent souls, I tremble when I read of your constant penitential exercises ! You spent your lives in deserts and caves, in constant hunger and thirst, in heat and cold, clad in the coarse garb of penance, while you tore your flesh with scourges and bitterly bewailed your sins ; and after you had spent three, ten, twenty, or more years in that manner, you did not even then dare to assure yourselves that you had recovered the grace and friendship of God. “I have seen many of these men with my own eyes” (so writes St. John Climacus), “and if I had not seen them, I should not have believed it possible for them to have lived as they did. Some of them stood with outstretched hands, looking towards heaven, bathed in tears of contrition, nor could you hear any sound from them but the groans

Hence
many saints
spent their
lives doing
severe pen-
ance.

and sighs with which they implored the mercy of heaven for their sins. Others, like the public sinner in the Gospel, did not dare to raise their eyes to heaven, but stood quite still, trembling with fear and anxiety, with grief and sorrow. Others, again, clad in rough sackcloth, beat their own countenances rudely with their clenched hands, and watered the earth with their tears. Others would roar like lions and refuse to eat bread, deeming themselves unworthy of human food, since they had formerly lived like unreasoning animals. Others beat their breasts so violently that the blood gushed out from their mouths. Others were so worn out by their constant weeping, that they seemed as if they had been burnt up, and their unceasing cry was: 'O Lord, have mercy on me, a wretched sinner.' If they sometimes happened to converse with each other, their first question was, who knows whether the sentence of eternal damnation that was pronounced against us, has been revoked? Who knows whether our sins have been forgiven? Who knows whether we are reconciled to the God whom we have offended?' The slothful and careless look on such things as incredible,"¹ concludes St. John Climacus. But not they who realize the wretched state to which mortal sin reduces the soul, and who understand what it is to offend grievously and despise the almighty God. St. Jerome writes of St. Paula of Rome, that after the death of her husband she gave all her goods to the poor, left her daughters and her country, went to Bethlehem, and spent her life in such strict penance, that she lost her strength from constant fasting, her eyes were ruined by continual weeping, and she never, even in the heat of a violent fever, left off a hair-shirt that she wore. When she was advised to moderate her tears, lest she should injure her sight, and to mitigate the rigor of her penances, that she might not shorten her life, she answered with a deep sigh: ah, let me weep and destroy the countenance that in former days, while I was in Rome, led me so often into sin by extravagance in dress and following the fashions of the world. My body must now be unceasingly mortified, since it formerly indulged so much in sensuality and love of pleasure. The laughter and dissipation of former years must be atoned for by constant floods of tears, and my vanity in dress by the rough sackcloth. St. Bernard, who was so innocent, and had only small faults to repent of, acknowledges with regard to himself:

¹ Heu me miserum, ignosce Domine.

² Hæc omnia incredibilia quidem iudicabit piger et negligens.

"I am firmly resolved never to laugh, until I hear from the mouth of God those words: "Come, ye blessed," and not to cease weeping until I have escaped the sentence: "Depart from Me, you cursed" "¹

O ye holy penitents! I must again exclaim; I tremble with fear, when I consider your penitential and mortified lives, which still could not inspire you with full confidence that God had forgiven you your sins! And I, who, from my childhood, have committed so many grievous sins; who have so often alternated between sin and confession, confession and sin; who before confession awakened some kind of a sorrow either by reciting a few words out of a prayer-book, or by repeating, in a cold, half-hearted manner, an act of contrition I had learned off by heart; I, after a repentance of that kind, which should justly inspire me with distrust, and the earnestness of which I have good reason for doubting, dare to persuade myself that I have no further cause for fear, as if I were innocence itself, and to lead a comfortable, easy, and pleasant life! Oh, no, sinner, that will not do! As St. John Chrysostom reminds us, "a penitent must not forget his sins, but rather beg of God to forget them, and to remember himself." "² The true penitent, says St. Augustine, who wishes to be assured of the salvation of his soul, must be sorry for his sins as long as he lives." "³ Whenever the sins he has committed occur to his memory, he must be sorry for them; for he knows that he has sinned and lost the grace of God, but he is never infallibly certain that he has been forgiven and has been again received into favor by God. He should always be contrite, so that amongst repeated acts of contrition at least one may be found which is truly supernatural, and which will merit forgiveness. But, you might object, there are learned, prudent, and pious confessors, who frequently advise and command their penitents not to think of the sins of their past lives, nor to make another general confession of them, but to be satisfied with the confession they have made. That is true; but to what kind of penitents do they say that? under what circumstances? and what is their reason for saying it? They do not give advice of that kind to those who go to confession once or twice a year only, or on the

Therefore the sinner should never cease repenting of his sins.

¹ Firmum est mihi propositum, nunquam ridendi quousque audiam ex ore Dei illa verba: venite benedicti; neque a fletu desistam, donec liber sim ab illa sententia: ite maledicti.

² Penitentem non oportet oblivioni tradere peccatum suum, sed Deum deprecari ut Deus quidem peccati ejus non meminerit, ipsum autem non oblivisci.—St. Chrysos. Hom. 31 in Hebr. x.

³ Penitens semper doleat.

principal feasts; much less to those who come to confession burdened with mortal sins; but rather to those pious, but troubled and fearful souls, who, after having carefully prepared themselves, examined their consciences, and awakened a true sorrow to the best of their ability, make a general confession of their whole lives, and still refuse to be comforted, but trouble and annoy themselves with scruples and doubts as to whether they, perhaps, have not left out some circumstance that it was necessary to confess, etc. Confessors prudently advise penitents of this kind to think no more of the sins of their past lives; not that they should forget that they were sinners, or that they should cease repenting of their sins; but that they may not fatigue their imaginations by re-considering sins that they have already validly confessed and that they are not bound to confess again. And confessors have just reason for giving that advice in the case of sins against holy purity, the recollection of which is apt to fill the mind with impure thoughts, so that there may be a danger of relapsing into the same sins of which one has already repented. Otherwise no one is forbidden to remember that he has often sinned, or to repent of his sins in a general way, or to confess them in general, in his ordinary confessions, in order to be more sure of having a proper sorrow and of making a good confession. Thus it still remains true that he who is really penitent must be always sorry that he has offended God.

Even if he is assured that his sins are forgiven.

But suppose, O sinner, you are quite certain that the confession you made of your former sins was a good one, that your sorrow was truly supernatural, and your purpose of amendment an earnest one, so that you really amended your life afterwards; and hence that you are quite sure that God has forgiven you: and a human certainty of the kind may exist when one has abstained for a long time from the grievous sins which he was formerly in the habit of committing, and still abstains from them; I will even suppose that you have had a divine revelation assuring you of the remission of your sins; yet there is still not the least doubt that you have grievously offended God. And is not that a most deplorable fact? I have aroused the anger of my God. I have lost the Supreme Good. I have made the Almighty my enemy. I have insulted, before His very face, God, who is most worthy of all love, a fact that cannot be blotted out, even by tears of blood copious enough to fill the ocean. For it is true, and will be true for all eternity, that I have grievously offended the almighty God, so that I have just reason for bewailing my

sins all my life long. Alexander the Great, although he had attained the very summit of earthly honors and prosperity, could never forget the shameful deed he had been guilty of in killing Callisthenes, his tutor, whom he formerly loved most dearly. "This," says the historian, "was the undying crime of Alexander, which no subsequent virtuous act, and no military success, could obliterate from his memory."¹ For it always remains true that "he has slain Callisthenes."² Posterity will be amazed at the prodigious exploits of this king, who surpassed all the sovereigns of the earth; but it will always condemn him for the murder of Callisthenes. People will say of him, he was a great monarch, for whose victorious arms the world was too small; but nevertheless he was an unjust and blood-thirsty tyrant, for he slew the innocent Callisthenes, his own preceptor. Truly, an undying crime, which can never fade from the memory!

It was a thought of this kind, my dear brethren, that forced hot tears of repentance from David, Magdalene, Peter, Paul, and others penitents, down to their latest moments. "My tears have been my bread day and night," says David: "whilst it is said to me daily: Where is thy God?"³ Alas, I have abandoned my God; I have slain the innocent Urias; I have committed the abominable crime of adultery! Alas, what have I done! "These things I remembered, and poured out my soul in me."⁴ But why, David, why art thou so troubled? Thou hast found thy God again, and hast heard from the lips of the Prophet, speaking on the part of God, that thy sin has been taken away (Ah, would that I, wretched sinner that I am, had a similar assurance!). True, David might answer; that is, indeed, a great consolation for me, but it does not destroy the fact that I have sinned; for it will remain true for all eternity that I have abandoned my God, slain an innocent man, and committed a horrible adultery. Posterity may read of me that I was a model of meekness, a man after God's own heart, who did His will in all things; but it will read also that I was guilty of murder and adultery, and that I rebelled against God. Truly, that is an undying shame for me. And therefore I will not cease to shed tears of sorrow: "Every night I will wash my bed; I will water my couch with

After the
example of
the penitent
David.

¹ Hoc est Alexandri crimen æternum, quod nulla virtus, nulla bellorum felicitas redimet.

² Callisthenem occidit.

³ Fuerunt mihi lacrymæ meæ panes die ac nocte: dum dicitur mihi quotidie: ubi est Deus tuus?—Ps. xli. 4.

⁴ Hæc recordatus sum, et effudi in me animam meam.—Ibid. 5.

my tears.”¹ Therefore, “my sorrow is continually before me; for I will declare my iniquity, and I will think for my sin,”² that my repentance for it may be continual, and thus at last fully wash it out.

The penitent Magdalene.

Enter in spirit, my dear brethren, the cave into which Magdalene crept after the ascension of Our Lord, and in which she spent the remainder of her life. Consider that holy penitent, cut off from all human society, observing constant silence, clad in a rough camel-hair garment, a discipline in her hand, streaming with blood, raising her eyes to heaven, and continually weeping for her sins. Ask her why she does penance for such a long time; for she has heard, not from a prophet, but from Jesus Christ Himself, the words: “Thy sins are forgiven thee.”³ Ah, she would reply, why should I cease to weep, although my sins are forgiven? Can I ever contradict that deplorable fact, “And behold a woman that was in the city a sinner”?⁴ I am the one who have so often and so grievously offended my Saviour. But remember, Magdalene, that thou wert afterwards inflamed with a burning love for the same Saviour; and that to thee was given the privilege, before many others, of receiving Him as thy guest. True; but remember also what I was before, “a woman that was in the city a sinner.” Remember how Christ loved thee after thy conversion; how He defended thee against the unjust suspicions of the Pharisees; thou art the one to whom, according to the Gospel, He first appeared after His resurrection; and now, in thy cave, thou art often visited by angels, and comforted by heavenly consolations. That is all true; but, “a woman that was in the city a sinner,” that is a crime I cannot forget.

St. Peter and Paul.

The same answer would be given by St. Peter, if he were asked why, during the remainder of his life, he wept whenever he heard the cock crow; although he, too, was assured that his sin was forgiven by Our Lord. Alas, he would say, do you not hear how the cock accuses me of having denied my master, and of having said publicly with an oath that I knew Him not? This accusation I can never deny; how, then, can I refrain from weeping when I think of it? The same answer, too, would be given

¹ *Lavabo per singulas noctes lectum meum; lacrymis meis stratum meum rigabo.*—Ps. vi. 7.

² *Dolor meus in conspectu meo semper: quoniam iniquitatem meam annuntiabo et cogitabo pro peccato meo.*—Ibid. xxxvii. 18, 19.

³ *Remittuntur tibi peccata.*—Luke vii. 48.

⁴ *Ecce mulier quæ erat in civitate peccatrix.*—Ibid. 37.

by the great St. Paul, the vessel of election. Although he had labored so much for the honor and glory of Christ; although he had for Christ's sake suffered imprisonment, chains, scourging, banishment, and countless trials; although he had been rapt up to the third heaven, and had there seen the joys that God has prepared for those who love Him; yet he acknowledges: "I speak the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost: that I have great sadness and continual sorrow in my heart."¹ And why? O great Saint. Alas, why do you ask me? Shall I not be troubled when I think of the obstinacy of the Jews, who refuse to believe in Christ? But that is the least; for when I consider myself, I find cause enough for continual sorrow, "because I persecuted the Church of God."² And therefore I am not worthy to be called an apostle. Alas, I have persecuted the Church of God; I can never forget that! It is an eternal crime, that no tears can wash away from my memory.

O sinner, what must you and I think? Have you, like those saints, received a revelation from God to assure you that your sins are forgiven? For my part, I have not. And yet, as if the sins we have committed were of no account, we reduce our repentance to such narrow limits, that we are satisfied with the sorrow we awakened before confessing those sins, and now think no more of them. Alas! we do not know what it is to offend the majesty of God, and to crucify anew by sin Jesus Christ, our Saviour; so that we have good reason for fearing that we do not belong to the number of true penitents, who repent of their sins through the fear and love of God, but rather to those false penitents, whom a slavish fear of punishment alone induces to repent.

He who seldom repents of his sins shows that his sorrow for them is hardly sincere.

Do you wish to understand more clearly the difference between those two? Imagine that you see two men confined in prison; the one has killed his enemy, whom he had long hated and pursued vindictively; the other got drunk, and in a sudden fit of anger, which reason was unable to control, took a knife and killed his own father. The sentence of death is pronounced on both; they tremble with fear; they weep, and wail, and curse the wicked deed that is the only cause of the violent and shameful death that is in store for them; so troubled are they, that they can neither eat, drink, nor sleep. Suppose, now, that both are

Shown by a simile.

¹ Veritatem dico in Christo, non mentior; testimonium mihi perhibente conscientia mea in Spiritu Sancto: quoniam tristitia mihi magna est, et continuus dolor cordi meo.—Rom. ix. 1, 2.

² Quoniam persecutus sum Ecclesiam Dei.—I. Cor. xv. 9.

pardoned by their sovereign. The first, who is of a rich and noble family, owes his pardon to the intercession of powerful friends; the second is set free, because he committed the murder while in a state of drunkenness, so that it was more the result of misfortune on his part than of design. Now, when these two men are released from prison, how do they act? The first, in the excess of his joy, prepares a great banquet and invites his friends to rejoice with him; all his former trouble and sorrow are forgotten; and no wonder, for they were caused, not by the fact that he had killed his enemy, but rather by his imprisonment and condemnation to death; in fact, he is still secretly glad that his enemy is out of the way, and since he has nothing more to fear on account of having killed him, his sorrow has quite disappeared. But does the man who killed his father act in the same way? Is he as joyful and gay as the other? Not by any means. If his friends congratulate him on his release, alas, he sighs, my dear father, where are you? why was I so wicked as to take away your life? He has neither peace nor rest; he is inconsolable whenever he hears his father's name; the very sight of a knife fills him with remorse; if he enters the room in which the crime was committed, or sees his relatives clad in mourning, the remembrance of his father fills his eyes with tears, nor will he ever forget him as long as he lives. And why? Because it was not the prison in which he was confined, nor the death that threatened him, but the unhappy murder of his father that was the cause of all his trouble; and, therefore, although he is now at liberty and freed from all danger, he still continues to deplore what has happened, with deep sorrow of heart.

But arose
from a mere
natural,
slavish fear.

O sinner, you who, as you imagine, are now converted, you may see from this to a certain extent what was the nature of the sorrow you had for your sins. As St. Paul assures us, you have, by every mortal sin you committed, crucified and murdered Jesus Christ, your heavenly Father, your Redeemer and your Supreme Good; and that you have done for many years, perhaps, by sins that you have committed hundreds and thousands of times. Thus you came into the slavery of the devil, and were over and over again condemned to eternal death. Through fear of that you have confessed your sins, after having repented of them, and the priest has given you absolution. Oh, you think, now I am all right; now I have recovered the grace of God. I am freed from prison and from the danger of eternal death. Now I can laugh

and enjoy myself as before; eat and drink, sleep and amuse myself; and make merry with my companions, as I did before (I will not say, sin as I did before); but you think no more of repenting of your former sins, than if you were innocence itself. Now consider the matter reasonably; is that not treating the almighty God as your enemy? Is it not as if you had killed some one against whom you had a grudge, or whom you deemed of little account? Is it not a dangerous sign that your repentance and sorrow arose not from the love of God, nor from the detestation of the insults you offered Him, nor from the fear of God, who could condemn you to hell, nor from hatred of your sins, on account of which you deserved hell (for all these truths remain as certain now as they ever were, and they will be so for all eternity); but simply from a mere slavish fear of being lost forever? But, supposing even that your sorrow was truly supernatural, and that you detested your sins because they deserved eternal damnation, that is in itself a sign that you do not really love God as a child should love his father.

No; quite different are the dispositions of a truly repentant soul, that has a real love of God, and sees clearly what a great Lord, worthy of all fear and love, has been offended by sin. He who is in those dispositions is not satisfied with the tears he has shed the first or second time; and although he has a human certainty that his sins have been taken away in the sacrament of penance, and that he has recovered the grace of God, yet he can never think without sorrow of heart of the sins by which he has offended the God whom he loves; everything that was an occasion of sin to him causes him displeasure. If he passes by the house in which the sin was committed; if he hears of the person who was his accomplice; alas, he thinks, what have I done? O my Lord and my God, forgive me! Would that I had never seen that person! Would that I had broken my leg before setting foot in that house! Would that a grievous illness had prevented me from going into that company; and then I would not have offended the good God, whom I now love above all things. There you have a true, supernatural sorrow, springing from the fear and love of God; a sorrow which ends only with life itself. For a true penitent must never cease deploring his sins.

But, you think, if that is the case, one must have a very sad time of it, indeed. There will be no such thing as saying a pleasant word to another, and one's life must be spent in con-

He who truly loves God is always sorry for having offended Him.

This constant sorrow is a great consolation.

lation for a
soul that
loves God

stant melancholy and sadness; for it appears that we must shut ourselves up and devote our time to weeping and lamentation. And how, then, can we serve God with child-like confidence and with joyful hearts, as He wishes to be served even by those who have been great sinners? But, my dear brethren, that conclusion is altogether erroneous. You must know that to do penance and be sorry for our sins is not to lead a sad, moping, melancholy life; it is rather to serve God with joy and confidence. Tears of sorrow are bitter in themselves; but what a sweet consolation they leave behind in the heart of the penitent! "The penitent must always be sorry," says St. Augustine, "and he must always rejoice at his sorrow."¹ He experiences a true heavenly joy and consolation, of which worldlings know nothing. Such is the promise made by God to his penitent children in these words: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted,"² not merely hereafter, in the eternal joys of heaven, but they will be comforted also in this life, and they will feel consoled in the midst of, nay, on account of the tears they shed; because their constant sorrow assures them all the more of forgiveness, and they have the testimony of their conscience that they are true children of God, who love their heavenly Father with their whole hearts. I ask all those who have had experience of this, whether it is not true. What a special relish, and consolation, and joy of heart is caused by shedding copious tears, as it were, through a sensible sorrow for sin! Those who know what it is, desire nothing more than to have that great and tearful sorrow; and it is only the absence of it that can really trouble them.

How to
practise this
constant
sorrow for
sin.

Let us put the matter to the test of experience, my dear brethren, and in future, when we think of our past sins, awaken a deep contrition and sorrow for them. We can find abundant opportunities for that every day; for instance, I can always begin my prayers by making an act of contrition, and think to myself: O great God, I am not worthy to appear before Thee, on account of the many and grievous sins by which I have offended Thy infinite majesty during my life. I am sorry for them from the bottom of my heart! Forgive me, O God, according to Thy great mercy! Before beginning my work, I can say, it is for Thy sake, O God, that I do this. Ah, would that I never had done anything in my life, but for Thee! Alas, the contrary was only too often the case with me, for I have offended

¹ *Pœnitens semper doleat, et de dolore gaudeat.*

² *Beat' qui lugent, quoniam ipsi consolabuntur.*—Matt. v. 5.

Thee by my actions! I am sorrow for it, O Lord! I hate and detest all I have ever done to displease Thee! And, as a matter of course, sorrow for sin must be awakened at the evening examen of conscience, and when preparing for confession, which should be frequent; moreover, it is the custom of all good Christians to accuse themselves in every confession of all the sins of their lives in a general manner. When I see or hear of others sinning grievously, I can think: O my God, I, too, have offended Thee often and grievously. I am heartily sorry for it; be merciful to me and to all poor sinners. When I read spiritual books, or hear in a sermon examples of people who are lost forever, I can say: alas, I have long ago deserved to be among the demons in hell! Perhaps those people have not committed so much sin as I. I am sorry, O Lord, for my sins; and I will praise forever the mercy with which Thou hast borne with me until now. On occasions of public calamity, or great misfortune, you can say: O my God, perhaps I am the cause of this, on account of my former sins. Ah, would that I had never sinned! If you prosper in your affairs, or things go well with you, you can say: ah, God of goodness! what have I done to deserve this? I, who have so often and so grievously offended Thee? Should I not shed bitter tears, when I think how wickedly I have acted towards Thee, while Thou dost not cease heaping benefits on me? Whenever I sit down to table, I can say: Oh, what a merciful God Thou art! Thou givest me food and drink, although I have merited to suffer eternal hunger and thirst among the demons in hell, on account of my sins. Forgive me, O Lord, I am sorry for them, from the bottom of my heart. When dressing or undressing: O Lord, I am not worthy of this clothing, since I have so often lost the beautiful garment of sanctifying grace by my sins. When I go to bed: O my God, I should by rights be now in hell, with flames for my covering; I am sorry for my sins. When tempted to sin: ah, my God, have I not, then, offended Thee enough? Ah, would that I had never sinned! I would now rather die a thousand times, than consent to sin. And especially, as I have often said already, in crosses, and trials, whether they come from other men, or from any cause whatever, and whenever I mortify myself, and undertake to do some work of penance, I must think: O my God, it serves me quite right; I have deserved this cross, this misfortune, this loss, this pain; I have deserved a thousand times, nay, infinitely worse, on account of my manifold sins. But I

am sorry for them now; do Thou only be gracious to me; and so on, in other circumstances. Truly, "blessed are they that mourn," and thus continually bewail their sins; "for they shall be comforted," here on earth, with a sweet and consoling repentance, and in heaven, with eternal consolation. In that way, then, I, a poor sinner, will now begin with St. Peter, and will continue to repent of my sins. May you all imitate me herein. Amen.

ON RELAPSE INTO SIN.

FORTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON THE DEFORMITY AND DANGER OF RELAPSE INTO SIN.

Subject.

To break by a relapse into sin the peace that has been established with God, is, 1. a wicked and an intolerable thing; 2. it is a very dangerous and desperate thing.—*Preached on Easter Tuesday.*

Text.

Pax vobis.—Luke xxiv. 36.

“Peace be to you.”

Introduction.

Praised be God, we are at last in the enjoyment of a most desirable peace! They who were formerly on the side of the devil and were waging war against God have now thrown down their rebellious arms, and have made an eternal peace with Him; and I hope that all here present have done so by a good Easter confession. I congratulate you with all my heart. And my words, or rather those of Our Lord Himself to you to-day, are, “Peace be to you,” just souls, that you may persevere in justice, and never violate, by a relapse into sin, the happy peace you have now established. Ah, my dear brethren, there is only one consideration that can now in any way disturb my joy: the fear lest this peace may not be of long duration with some; lest many may turn away again from God, and go over to the devil. For that wicked tempter will not fail to persecute those runaway soldiers of his; he will put occasions of sin in their way, and will try to tempt them by the allurements of the flesh to

give way to an inordinate love of creatures. Ah, Christians, "Peace be to you," I say again. And will you break that peace, and sin again, after having made a good confession? Ah, what a wicked, intolerable, and most dangerous thing that would be; as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

To break by a relapse into sin the peace that has been established with God is a wicked and an intolerable thing; so that, if we wish to act honorably, we should rather die than sin again; such will be the subject of the first part. To break by a relapse into sin the peace that has been established with God is a most dangerous and desperate thing, so that, if we are prudent and desirous of our eternal salvation, we should rather die than sin again; as we shall see in the second part. This sermon, that it may be profitable to all, will serve the good and pious to conceive a greater horror of sin, and to persevere in their innocence; while it will help those who have been accustomed to relapse into sin after confession to have a salutary fear of falling again, and those who have not yet done penance it will supply with motives that may induce them speedily to amend their lives.

Would to God that I could effect all this! It is Thou, O almighty God, who must do it; without Thy grace my words are but empty sounds. Penetrate, then, the hearts of all of us with Thy grace, and strengthen our purpose in good, that we may never desert Thee for all eternity. This we ask of Thee through that Virgin Mother of Thine, and ours, too, whom Thou canst not and wilt not refuse anything, and through the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

The name
of perjurer
is hateful to
every one.

It is easy to persuade those who are men of honor and probity that it is a shameful, wicked, and disgraceful thing to break an established peace; for what can be more disgraceful in the sight of all honorable men than to have the name of being perjured and faithless? Even among powerful monarchs, who have the sword in their hands, it is reckoned such a holy and sacred thing to observe a truce that has once been signed and agreed to, that, although a good opportunity may offer of ravaging the enemies' country, and subduing it, yet they shrink from an open violation of the contract entered into, and seek out for all sorts of pretexts to justify their action before renewing the war. Even amongst Turks and heathens he who violates a truce is looked on as dishonorable. And amongst private individuals, what

more disgraceful thing can be said of a man, than that he is a faithless, untrustworthy person, who does not keep his word, and whom no one can rely on? In fact, if a person asks anything from you that you have already promised to another, you say at once that you cannot give it, as you do not wish to break your word. But still, you have your free will to do as you please; and perhaps the person who asks you is one of high position, so that you would benefit yourself by doing him a service. No matter, you say; I have already given my word to another, and I must keep it. Is not that so?

Now you, whoever you may be, who have laid down the burden of your sins during this Easter season, do you know what you have done? You have given your word to the all-seeing and all-knowing God, who neither can nor will ever forget it; and you have entered into an eternal contract of peace with Him. The conditions to which you have agreed are as follows: I hereby renounce the devil and all his works, and will serve Thee, my Lord and my God alone, will love Thee with all my heart above all creatures; and I furthermore bind myself in the most sacred manner to keep Thy holy law inviolably; never more will I curse or swear, as I have hitherto done, nor do any one the least wrong, nor entertain hatred and enmity against my neighbor, nor vilify, nor detract from any one's good name, nor wilfully admit an unclean thought into my mind, or allow an impure word to fall from my lips, or give way to impure looks or touches; I will avoid that house, that company, which placed me in the dangerous occasion of sin; nor, as long as I live, will I commit any sin against Thy holy law. See, that is the promise you have made to God; and I presume that you meant it honestly when making it, or else your confession was bad, your penance worthless, and you have not made peace with God. On the other side, God has signed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, in the sacrament of penance, the following promises: all the sins you have committed are forgiven you; you are freed from the eternal pains of hell; I look upon you as My dear friend, and adopt you as My child, and as heir to My kingdom of heaven, and I will make you the object of My special care, as long as you remain faithful to Me. To all that God has bound Himself. As witnesses of this agreement, there are the angels and saints of heaven, who rejoiced and exulted at your conversion; and there are the devils, too, who ran away from you, full of rage and vexation, when you signed that contract with God.

The converted sinner has made a peace with God.

Now, the question is, which of you two will first break the agreement? You know well that God cannot be unfaithful to His word, so that it depends altogether on you, O man, whether you will keep your word, or not.

Which he breaks, perjuring himself therein, by relapsing into sin.

If you go back to your former wicked ways, to your injustice, or your impurity, even in desire, you are a faithless and perjured violator of the peace. What a disgraceful name that is to have before God and the world! How shameful for you to do such a thing! An honorable man keeps his word. Is it honorable to say, God has now received what belonged to Him; peace is concluded between us; but I do not wish to observe it any longer; I will go back to where I came from; I was better off in the service of the devil than in that of the almighty God; I did wrong to leave the former and to desert him for the sake of making peace with God; I will give back to the devil what I took from him, and again declare war on God? Would any honorable man, I ask, approve of such conduct? Shameless man, that you are, were you really better off in the service of the devil than in the friendship of God? Was that what you said when you repented of your sins? "The sinner who has done penance," says Tertullian, "can now make a comparison between God and the devil," for he has been in the service of both; "and whose service he again adopts, him he judges to be the best."¹ So that you judge the devil and his intolerable yoke to be better and more agreeable for you than your sovereign God and His service, if, after having received the grace of repentance, you again make up your mind to sin and to go back to the devil. What a shameful and unjust thing to do!

The injustice of this. Shown by a simile.

In former times there were certain idolatrous Indians in Peru, who were addicted to the following superstition: On a certain day of the year, they went out of their houses and left them wide open, for the sole purpose of allowing the devil to enter them for the short time of their absence. Let him only come, they said, and stop in our houses for this day if he wishes to do so, provided he leaves us in peace for the rest of the year. And these poor, ignorant people imagined that they could not occupy their dwellings with safety unless they allowed the devil to enter them for a short time. I pity them sincerely; but far more pitiable is the condition of those Christians who, after having made a good confession, fall again into their former sins; for

¹ Comparationem videtur egisse, qui utrumque cognoverit, et iudicato pronuntiassse eum mellorem, cujus se rursus esse maluerit.

they drive the devil out of their hearts, indeed, but only for a day, when they again invite him to enter and spend almost the whole year with them. For a few days they open the door of their hearts to the almighty God, but on the condition that He leaves them again, so that they can indulge their wicked desires and passions without restraint. For at Easter and on the greater feasts of the year they repent of and confess their sins, thus driving away the devil under whose tyranny they had been groaning; but this tyranny pleases those unfortunate people in their blindness, and they prefer it to the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ; therefore, when Easter-tide or the feast day is past, they recall the infernal serpent, and willingly cast themselves at his feet again as his bond-slaves. How the devil must laugh at such confessions and repentance! Let that man, he says to himself, turn me away and execrate me on Easter Sunday; it makes little matter to me: "I will return into my house from whence I came out."¹ Shameless sinner, who so easily relapse into your former sins, how can you refrain from regarding your inconstancy with horror and aversion? Is it possible that you can resolve thus coolly to insult your God, who has been so good to you, and who, when He might have condemned you to hell on account of your former sins, has, of His own accord, freely admitted you to His friendship and peace? And in this consists the deformity and inconceivable malice of the ingratitude of which you are guilty, when you relapse into sin. "He is ungrateful for the pardon bestowed on him," says St. John Chrysostom. "who sins again after having been forgiven."²

In order to see this more clearly, try now to recall with me, briefly, the great benefit that you received from the mercy of God, when, in your last confession, provided it was a good one, absolution was given you. You know what a wicked life you had been leading; how often and grievously you had sinned, by thought, word, deed, and desire, insulting God without shame before His very face for the sake of some worthless creature: trampling His holy law under foot, and treating Him so disrespectfully, that, if you had treated a man like yourself in the same way, you would never hope to regain his friendship, while, if you had been guilty of it towards your temporal superiors, you would certainly be condemned to the gallows. On account of those sins of yours, if the patient God had only permitted it,

He who has made a good confession has received a very great benefit from God.

¹ *Revertar in domum meam, unde exivi.*—Matt. xii. 44.

² *Indulgentiæ ingratus est, qui post veniam peccat.*

and had given but one sign of consent, all creatures would have risen up in arms against you to revenge the insult you offered their Creator; the earth was ready to swallow you up; the air, to strike you with a thunder-bolt; the devil, to break your neck and hurry you off to hell, body and soul. But the same God who was so ill-treated by you, who is not at all in need of you, who has nothing to fear or hope from you, looked on patiently for so many years or months at your dissolute conduct, allowed you to act towards Him as if He were a poor, despicable beggar, showed the greatest patience in bearing with you, and never ceased for a moment to do good to you. Moreover, He whom you offended was the first to beg, so to speak, for pardon, by the inspirations of His grace, without which you could not have repented; He it was who invited you to return to Him, and received you, His prodigal son, with such friendship and fatherly love; made an eternal peace with you, and forgave you your sins, by offering His own blood for you, so completely, that He resolved never during eternity to remember the insults you offered Him. While you were at war with God, you were lamentably stripped by the enemies of your soul, and deprived of all merits and graces; thus naked and miserable you came to confession, and the God whom you despised received you again, and clothed you with the precious robe of sanctifying grace. While you were under the yoke of the raging demon, you were racked and tortured for so many unhappy days and nights by your own bad conscience; and must you not acknowledge that such was the case? Oh, what bitter morsels you often had to swallow while you were in the wretched state of sin! How the worm gnawed at you! How your mad desires plagued you! What fear and anguish you often experienced! For, whether you wish to acknowledge it or not, it still remains true, as the God of truth Himself says: "Know thou and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee, to have left the Lord thy God."¹ Such is the experience of all sinners, unless they are already immersed in the depths of obduracy. From this miserable state the merciful God has drawn you, and placed you under His sweet yoke in the freedom of His dear children, so that you can live in the enjoyment of repose of conscience, which (no matter what any one says to the contrary) far surpasses all the joys of the vain world, and you can see what a difference there is between a ser-

¹ Scito, et vide quia malum et amarum est reliquisse te Dominum Deum tuum.—Jerem. ii. 19.

vant of God and a slave of the devil. Formerly you were a child of eternal damnation; you were already doomed to hell; to whom do you owe it that you are not now there, amongst the demons? To whom do you owe that great benefit? To no one but the merciful God Himself, who bore with you so patiently while you were in the wretched state of sin, and kept you in life. How many there were in the world who committed the same sins at the same time as you? how many who perhaps sinned in the same house or company? how many who sinned far less than you, nay, who then, perhaps, committed the first mortal sin of their lives; and yet they were surprised by the justice of God and hurled into hell, where they now burn without hope for all eternity? Could not the same fate have been yours? What had God to expect from you more than from them? If you had died then, where would you be now? Consider this well, O sinner, and you will see what an inestimable benefit it is. The good God has had patience with you in preference to many others, although you deserved a more severe punishment than they, and has saved you from the jaws of the infernal wolf, from the pains of hell, and has now concluded a peace with you, selecting you as one of His favorite children. What an exceeding great grace!

Now, He who has done all this for you, what does He deserve? I ask all men of honor and probity; does He deserve to be again insulted and offended by you? Is He not worthy of all the honor, love, and service you can show Him in the fulness of your gratitude? It was this consideration that moved David, after his sins had been forgiven, to make a resolution and cry out aloud: "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping: the Lord hath heard my supplication."¹ That is, as St. Jerome explains it, because I have received mercy from the Lord; because the good God has had regard to my tears of penance, has forgiven me my sins, and admitted me again to His favor and friendship; therefore I now renounce all sin; and, that I may never commit another during my whole life, "depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity:" depart from me, all dangers and occasions of sin, and everything that could even remotely lead me into sin, lest I should ever again in the least offend such a good God, who has conferred so great a benefit on me.

For which
he owes
God almost
constant
love.

¹ Discedite a me omnes qui operamini iniquitatem, quoniam exaudivit Dominus vocem fletus mei: exaudivit Dominus deprecationem meam.—Ps. vi. 9, 10.

By relaps-
ing into
sin he is
guilty of
the blackest
ingratitude.

But you, O sinner, on whom the same grace and mercy have been bestowed, what do you do by way of acknowledging the great benefit you have received? Or, rather, what are you thinking of doing, if you have made up your mind to return to your old evil ways, and to fall into sin again? O accursed ingratitude! See, O God, you say, by your acts at least, I have with repentance and sorrow of heart begged forgiveness of Thee; but now I retract my words. Thou hast shown Thy mercy to me; but I do not care for it. Thou hast given me Thy grace; but I do not want it, take it back. Thou hast admitted me into the number of Thy soldiers and friends; I hereby renounce Thy service and Thy friendship, for, I wish to enroll myself again in the army of the devil, to fight against Thee. Thou hast freely forgiven me many great debts I owed Thee; now I am going to contract fresh ones. Thou hast liberated me, in preference to many others, from eternal damnation; but I am not afraid of that any more; Thou canst keep Thy heaven and its joys; the broad road to hell is more pleasing to me. I have hitherto offended and insulted Thee by impure thoughts and desires, and Thou hast pardoned me; now I am about to repeat the offence. I have often aroused Thee to anger by unchaste and slanderous talk; yet that matters little, as Thou hast forgiven me; so I am now about to repeat the same kind of sinful language. By my scandalous and wicked actions I have crucified anew Thee, my Saviour, who didst die for the love of me; but I am absolved now, and Thou wilt have somewhat more to suffer from me. Thou hast hitherto been, O God, extremely patient in bearing with me; I am glad to have that to say, for I am going to try Thy patience farther, as I do not intend to leave off sinning. Hear, ye men of honor, what do you think of conduct like that? Be amazed, O ye angels and saints in heaven, who a short time ago rejoiced at this sinner's conversion; see how he acts now. And you, ye demons and lost souls in hell, be filled with astonishment; if God were to do one of you the grace and favor of releasing him from his fiery prison and giving him time for repentance, what would you think of it? And would not the favored one bow down before the Almighty and serve Him in the severest penance, even till the Day of Judgment? Ye lions, and tigers, and beasts of the wilderness, who are grateful in your own way, well may you wonder at the ingratitude of reasoning man, who makes such a base return to his greatest Benefactor! See, O God, such are the

thanks Thou receivest from the sinner whom Thou hast re-admitted to Thy favor. Didst Thou institute the holy sacrament of penance only that men might have an opportunity of provoking Thee still more to anger? Hast Thou forgiven this sinner all his sins, only that he may sin and insult Thee still more grievously?

O mortals, if you still have human hearts, think, for God's sake, what a hateful thing it is to fall back into sin after having repented. Christian soul, see how unjustly and odiously you act when you repeat your former sins. "How exceeding base art thou become," I must say to you, in the words of the Prophet Jeremias, "going the same ways over again."¹ And the words of St. Peter may well be applied to you: "For that of the true proverb has happened to them: The dog is returned to his vomit: and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."² O my good God, how is it possible that I should offend Thee again? No, O Lord, I acknowledge the great benefit Thou hast bestowed on me, and I return Thee infinite thanks that Thou hast not condemned me to hell, as Thou mightest have done, and that Thou hast borne with me so patiently for so many years, and received me again with fatherly love into Thy favor. I will keep my word, and honorably fulfil my promise to Thee. "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity;" away with all that could lead me away from Thee. Away with all occasions and companions that might be the cause of sin to me. I will be faithful to my God to the end, I will be grateful to Him forever, and I will rather give up my life itself, than offend my generous Benefactor again. Such, O Lord, is the resolution I mean to keep unalterably, with the help of Thy grace. But I am afraid that there are some whose unmortified desires and inclinations, whose inveterate bad habits, and deep-rooted love for creatures, have deprived them of all sense of shame, and who, therefore, have little scruple in committing a dishonorable action, so that, like dumb animals, they must be impelled by fear and stripes to do their duty. Have patience now for a little while longer, and consider with me the exceeding great danger in which they are who, after confession, fall back into their former sins, in order that they who cannot be moved by a sense of shame may be at least

Conclusion
to be always
faithful to
God.

¹ Quam vilis facta es nimis, iterans vias tuas.—Jerem. II. 36.

² Contigit enim eis illud verbi proverbii: canis reversus est ad suum vomitum; et sus
lota in volutabro luti.—II. Pet. II. 22.

frightened from a relapse by the fear of eternal ruin. This we shall see in the

Second Part.

Similes
showing the
danger the
sinner in-
curs by
relapsing.

Imagine that a citizen of this town, while travelling yesterday through a forest, was assaulted by a band of robbers, who stripped him of all he had, so that he barely escaped with his life. But, nevertheless, this very morning he dresses himself in a new suit of clothes, fills his purse with money, and is on the point of setting out to travel through the same forest, although he knows well that the robbers are still there. What would you think of that? Would it not be a most fool-hardy, senseless thing to do? Again, a merchant has lost all his goods in a shipwreck, and has with difficulty saved his life by clinging to a broken plank; but hardly has he reached home, when he purchases new wares, and puts them into an old, leaky vessel. Is he not a rash and foolish man? That rashness and fool-hardiness are yours, O sinner! You know into what a band of robbers you fell, when you entered on the way of vice; how deplorably your poor soul was stripped of all merits and graces. You know in what a stormy sea you suffered the most unfortunate of shipwrecks, and how you seized the plank of penance, "the second plank after shipwreck," the second haven of refuge. It was the means of bringing you to God, so that in a short time you recovered your spiritual life, and your soul was filled with graces. But if you intend again to travel the same road, to embark on the same sea, what can you expect but that the same fate as before is in store for you? Where is your common sense? Can you not see the certain and eternal danger, and the almost unavoidable ruin that threatens your soul?

He runs the
risk of
never being
forgiven.

Yes, you say, I know all about that; but I will escape it as I did before. Next Easter I will go to confession again; in a few months' time I will do penance again, and make peace anew with God. What an idea! Is that the talk of a sensible man? If the citizen or the merchant were to say: I will let myself be robbed again, and will be sorry for it afterwards; I will suffer shipwreck again, and will save my life by means of a plank, and then regret my misfortune; could anything more foolish be imagined? And what is it you say, presumptuous man, when you maintain that you will repent again and make peace? With whom will you make peace? With God? What? With the God whom you have so often deceived and betrayed? Will

He, to whom you have so often broken your plighted word, believe you again, await you, and, as soon as you present yourself, admit you to His friendship? How can you expect such a thing? If you had to deal with a man like yourself, and had proved untrue to him as often as you have to God, you would not dare to entertain the faintest hope of regaining his friendship; or, at all events, you would have a severe punishment to expect from him. Many have experienced to their cost what it is to violate an established peace. The Turks still smart under the effects of the want of faith they were guilty of in violating the peace made with the Roman emperor, and Christians, too, have found out that they cannot with impunity violate a treaty of peace made even with the hereditary foes of the Christian name. But let us speak of ourselves. Suppose your servant does something wrong; the first time you pass it over; but if the next day the fault is repeated, you look on it as a much more serious matter, and it requires a great deal more patience on your part to allow it to go unpunished. But if the servant commits the same fault three, four, five, or six times; O! you think, with just anger, this is too much! I cannot keep a servant of that kind in my house; away with him at once! Now, O sinner, such and far worse is the way in which you act, not towards a mere mortal, but towards the almighty God Himself, when, after repeated confessions, you return to your former sins; how, then, can you flatter yourself that you will easily find grace again with the same God. Do you think you have to deal with one whom you can befool as you please?

Ah, believe me, it is not so easy as you imagine! “Be not deceived,” is the warning given us by St. Paul; “God is not mocked.”¹ He has patience with weak mortals for a long time; but, if they abuse it too much, His patience will be wearied out, and will be changed into a just anger. We have a most merciful God, my dear brethren, who bears with the sinner with the utmost long-suffering and in silence, and who is always ready, at any moment, to receive him who wishes to return to Him by true penance; but when there is no sign of amendment, and the sinner acts towards Him as if he wished to mock Him, then He is an inexorable and most just God. Jesus Christ, our most meek Saviour, who, on account of His mildness, received the name of being a protector and harbinger of sinners, forgave all her sins to the repentant Magdalene; but it was the first time

For at last the patience of God may turn to anger.

¹ Nolle errare : Deus non irridetur.—Gal. vi. 7.

she repented of them. The Father in the Gospel, to whom God likens Himself, went out to welcome the prodigal son, after the latter had spent all his substance in riotous living, but it was the first time the prodigal returned. Christ forgave the woman taken in adultery, and said to her: "Neither will I condemn thee:" but it was the first time with her, and therefore He added: "Go, and now sin no more."¹ He pardoned the thief on the cross at the latter's first prayer for mercy, and brought him to paradise; but it was the first time that the thief confessed and repented of his sins. If Magdalene had gone back to her former sinful life; if the prodigal had returned to herd swine; if the adulterous woman had fallen into sin again; if the thief had again blasphemed Christ; and if they had done that for the second, third, and tenth time, as you, O sinner, do nowadays for the twentieth and hundredth time, do you think they would be received with just as much grace and love? Oh, no! far different is the lesson taught us by the Holy Scripture; far different the experience of many sinners who are continually alternating between repentance and sin.

Shown from
Scripture.

The same merciful God, who had borne with the murmurings and repeated revolts of His people in the desert, punished them with sudden death, and sent them to hell, because they had rebelled against Him too often. The same God, who had been so patient with Absalom the first time he had sinned by murdering his brother, allowed him to be pierced with three lances, and to die impenitent, when he revolted against his father David. The same God, who pardoned Achab, on his repenting of having coveted Naboth's vineyard, gave him up to death when he threw the Prophet Michæas into prison. The same God, who had resolved to pardon the inhabitants of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, and Edom, for the third time, had also determined not to forgive them the fourth sin. "For three crimes of Damascus and for four I will not convert it."² The Scripture is full of similar threats. What the Prophet David says of God is therefore true, "God shall break the heads of His enemies, the hairy crown of them that walk in their sins."³ So great is His hatred of those who, as it were, walk up and down in their sins, changing sins with confession, and confessions with sins, that,

¹ Nec ego te condemnabo: vade et jam amplius noli peccare.—John viii. 11.

² Super tribus sceleribus Damascus, et super quatuor non convertam eum.—Amos i. 3.

³ Deus confringet capita inimicorum suorum; verticem capilli perambulantium in delictis suis.—Ps. lxvii. 22.

while He will break the heads of those who declare continual war on Him, yet He will not leave a hair on the heads of the others. O sinners, who, not merely for the fourth or fifth time, but so often, have trodden the ways of sin, have you a greater certainty of pardon than those others had? What promise, or document, have you to prove that? Ah, cease sinning at last! You have played with the divine mercy more than enough already. If you have now made a good confession, and have been admitted to pardon, grace, and favor, thank God for that; but let what you have now received hold good forever. "Be careful," is the warning St. Gregory gives you, "not to die again; for it is uncertain whether you will be awakened again to life."¹ It is at least exceedingly dangerous. If, then, a sense of decency does not keep you from relapsing into sin, at all events you should fear the evident danger of eternal ruin.

But suppose, O sinner, that your hopes are realized, and that the merciful God will be ready, when it suits you again to repent after having offended Him, to receive you into His friendship—and, indeed, He has promised, in His goodness, that He will not repel the sinner for the seventy-seventh time—how do you know that you will do penance again, especially since God must impel you thereto by His forestalling grace? How do you know that you will have time to repent? In a few days you will again gratify your brutal passions, and next Easter, or in some months' time, you will again go to confession; now, who has told you that you will live till next Easter, or for a few months? May you not die in the meantime? Who can promise you that you will live to-morrow, or even for one hour more? Has not Our Lord expressly said: "It is not for you to know the times or moments, which the Father hath put in His own power"?² But if no one is sure of a single moment, how much less can you dispose of the future time? "He," says St. Augustine, "who has promised to pardon the repentant sinner, has not promised to give the sinner the morrow for repentance." Again, I ask you, do you not see the manifest danger you run into when you relapse into sin? Do you not see how presumptuous you are to trust your eternal salvation to a matter that is quite uncertain, namely, the future time? Ah, unhappy man, who say or think that you will do penance hereafter, perhaps hereafter, when you

He runs the risk of never doing penance again.

¹ Cave ne rursus emoriaris; incertum est enim, an rursus ad vitam excitandus sis.

² Non est vestrum nosse tempora vel momenta, quæ Pater posuit in sua potestate.—Acts 1. 7.

shall have again fallen into sin, you will be in your grave! For God's sake, then, consider well what you are doing. It is not money or temporal goods that depend on it; it is your own soul, your happiness or misery for eternity.

Shown by a
simile.

A soldier has deserted, and is therefore condemned to the gallows. While lying in prison, he conceives a plan of escape, which he manages to carry into execution; and as his guards are sleeping, he makes a hole in the wall of his cell, and gets out. He is running away at top speed, when suddenly a thought strikes him: ha, he says, I have forgotten my night-cap in the cell; I will go back for it, and I can get away again the next night. What would you think of him, my dear brethren? Would you not cry out to him, fool that you are! have you lost your senses? Will you risk your life for a worthless thing like that? Run off as hard as you can, so that no one may see you. You have now a good chance of escape, and if you throw it away you may never get another. No, the soldier answers, I must have my night-cap; I cannot do without it. Well, then, you would say to him, go and get it, and in a few days you can take it to the gallows with you and wear it there. O sinner! you have been hitherto kept in prison by the devil, chained hand and foot; you were on the point of eternal death. Sentence was already pronounced on you and would have been carried into execution, but by your Easter confession, you managed to escape from your prison; do not be so foolish as to enter it again for a worthless thing. Do not say, I will go again to that house; I have left there something I am very fond of; I will go into that company in order to gratify my passions, etc., and afterwards I will repent, and leave my prison, by the open door of penance. O senseless man! you are now on the right road to heaven. Go on, in God's name, or else you will perhaps be imprisoned forever in hell! Do you not see that these ideas of yours are mere deceits of the devil, who says: "I will return into my house from whence I came out." ¹

He will
afterwards
fruitlessly
bemoan his
misery.

Oh, woe to you, if you allow him to return! "Woe to you, apostate children," ² says the Lord. Woe to you, O man; I warn you for the last time; woe to you, if you fall again into sin! Woe to you during life, for you will have no blessing from God! Woe to you on your death-bed, for you will seek the Lord, and you will hardly find him, but die in your sins! Woe to you in

¹ Revertar in domum meam unde, exivi?—Matt. xii. 44.

² Vae, filii desertores.—Isa. xxx. 1.

judgment! The angels, to whom you now are a source of joy by your conversion, will condemn you; the very Easter confession you have made, the graces you have received, in preference to so many others, will be a reproach to you. Woe to you for all eternity in hell, if you should be condemned to go there, than which there is nothing more reasonable or natural to expect for one who refuses to amend. Oh, how you will there bewail your folly when it is too late! Foolish man that I am, you will say, what have I done? Was I not well off, after I made my confession? Did not the good God do me the favor of pardoning me my many sins, and receiving me into the number of His beloved children? I was an heir of the kingdom of heaven! Blind mortal that I was! What demon was it that drove me again into sin! What madness brought me again into that company! Oh, would that I had sinned not more! Would that I had not gone near that house, that person! If I had kept on in the way of justice, I should now be amongst the elect in heaven! As it is, I am lying in the flames of hell, where I shall have to remain forever! Oh, accursed and foolish man that I am! what have I done?

My dear brethren, that none of us may have to utter those howls of a tardy and useless repentance, let us now follow the advice of St. Paul: "Stand fast, and be not held again under the yoke of bondage."¹ You have now made peace with God and given Him your word; "stand fast," and be not the first to break the contract. "Peace be to you;" may the peace of God be with you always. Carefully avoid all occasions of sin. Every morning, when you rise, renew your good resolutions, and remind yourselves of what you promised God in your last confession. Say to yourselves: shall I then be untrue to God? Shall I repay with the blackest ingratitude the great benefit He has conferred on me? Shall I again place myself in evident danger of eternal damnation? Oh, woe to me, if I should this evening again become an enemy of God, a bond-slave of the devil, and go to bed with a mortal sin on my soul! It would be better for me to drop down dead, than to become again a slave to sin! Better for me to be stone-blind, than to look on an unchaste object! Better for me to be deaf, than to listen to impure conversation! Better for me to be dumb, than to indulge in the usual uncharitable or scandalous talk! Better for me to break both legs, than to put foot in that house, or to go into that company

Conclusion
and resolution
to be
constant in
good.

¹ State, et nollite iterum iugo servitutis contineri.—Gal. v. 1.

again! Better for me to lose both hands, than to stretch them forth to seize unjust gains, or to indulge in unlawful touches! Better for me to be lamed in my whole body, than to abuse it to gratify my brutal passions! Better for me that my house and all I have should be burned to the ground, than that I should lose heaven by sin! Better for me to die and be thrown out this very evening, than that I should again offend God! Oh, no, my God! with Thy help, that shall not be! I will henceforth honorably keep my word. "My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake," I will say with Thy servant Job. Let who will come, and say, or flatter, or threaten what and how he wishes, I will not forsake Thee. I have been unfaithful to Thee often enough already! Often enough, alas! too often, have I angered Thee! Henceforth I will atone for those insults by greater zeal in Thy love and service. "My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake;" such is my unalterable resolution. Rather any misfortune, than sin! Rather death, than sin! Rather hell, than sin! Almighty God, strengthen, by Thy grace, this resolution of mine, and, I hope, of us all! And so I say again in Thy name, "peace be to you;" peace be with you forever. Amen.

FIFTIETH SERMON.

ON THE EVILS OF WHICH A RELAPSE INTO SIN IS A SIGN.

Subject.

To fall back easily into one's former sins, 1. is a certain sign that one is not really arisen from sin by confession, as Christ arose from the dead; 2. it is an almost infallible sign that one has not done true penance.—*Preached on the first Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Gavisi sunt ergo discipuli, viso Domino.—John xx. 20.

"The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord."

Introduction.

Again there is joy and exultation amongst the disciples!

¹ Justificationem meam, quam coepi tenere, non deseram.—Job xxvii. 6.

Evils of which a Relapse into Sin is a Sign. 163

They have seen the Lord, and they know that He is really risen from the dead. Again, too, there is joy and exultation in the Church of God at this season. The faithful children of the Church have arisen from the death of sin, with Christ, by the Easter confession. God grant that such may be really the case with all of them! I hope for the best, my dear brethren; let us rejoice in the Lord. But there is one thing that still troubles me, as it did on a former occasion; namely, that this joyful feast will be spoiled in a short time by some who, in a few weeks or days, will return to their former evil ways. How wicked and ungrateful it is thus to act towards the good God, and what imminent danger it places the soul in, I have shown in my last sermon. To-day, I shall confine myself to Our Lord's resurrection and to our moral resurrection; and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

If you, O Christian, habitually and easily fall back into your former sins, it is a certain sign that you are not truly risen by your Easter confession, as Christ rose from the dead; this I shall show briefly in the first part. It is an almost infallible sign that you did not truly repent when making your Easter confession; as I shall show more at length in the second part. Therefore, be constant in the divine service; such shall be the conclusion.

Give us all Thy grace, O Lord, to make a firm resolution to that effect. We ask it of Thee, through the intercession of Thy holy Mother and of our holy guardian angels.

For our moral resurrection, from the death of sin to the life of grace, to be real, it must in all respects be conformable to the resurrection of Christ; for this latter is the proper model and pattern of ours, as St. Paul expressly teaches: "For we are buried together with Him by baptism into death," he writes to the Romans, "that, as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For, if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."¹ Here we might ask, why does the Apostle put before us the resurrection of Christ as an example of the conversion of the sinner? Did not Lazarus rise from the dead? And could he not have said that we must begin a new life, just as Lazarus did after his resurrection?

Christ, after rising from the dead, did not die again.

¹ *Consepulti enim sumus cum illo per baptismum in mortem; ut quomodo Christus surrexit a mortuis per gloriam Patris, ita et nos in novitate vitæ ambulemus. Si enim complantati facti sumus similitudini mortis ejus: simul et resurrectionis erimus.*—Rom. vi. 4, 5.

There is a great difference, my dear brethren, between the one case and the other. It is true that Lazarus rose from the dead; but it is also true that he died again. Such was not the case with Our Lord and Saviour. "Knowing," continues the Apostle, "that Christ rising again from the dead dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over Him;" having once left the grave, He returns to it no more. "For in that He died to sin, He died once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God."

There is no trace of this in one who easily relapses into sin after confession.

In the same way should the truly penitent Christian rise from the grave of sin; not like Lazarus, who died again; but like Jesus Christ, so that he must persevere in the life of sanctifying grace, and never more return wilfully to the tomb of his former sins. "Thus," says the Abbot Guericus, "the Christian rising with Christ no longer dies by mortal sin; sin will no more have power over him."¹ And that is also what the Apostle says: "That the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer."² And he even asks how it is possible that we should again be the servants of sin: "For we that are dead to sin, how shall we live any longer therein?"³ These words at once suggest the question, if it is not likely that he who is really risen with Christ to life will fall back again into the death of sin, how can we believe that he is really risen from the death of sin to the life of grace, who so easily returns to his former wicked ways; who, a few days after his Easter confession, buries himself in the grave in which he was before, and who almost always brings the same mortal sins to confession? How can we believe that? No; it cannot be. He who relapses into sin gives clear proof that he did not rise with Christ.

Christ arose unbound, leaving his grave-clothes behind.

Again, how do we know that Lazarus after his resurrection was to die again, but not Christ, and, therefore, that Our Lord arose to a perfect, eternal life? Eusebius Emissenus answers this question: "Christ left His grave-clothes in the sepulchre; but Lazarus did not."⁴ When a galley comes to port, all the galley-slaves and passengers land at once; the former, to pur-

¹ *Scientes quod Christus resurgens ex mortuis jam non moritur, mors illi ultra non dominabitur: quod enim mortuus est peccato, mortuus est semel; quod autem vivit, vivit Deo.*—Rom. vi. 9, 10.

² *Sic Christianus conresurgens Christo jam non peccat ad mortem, nec ei peccatum ultra dominatur.*

³ *Ut destruat corpus peccati, et ultra non serviamus peccato.*—Rom. vi. 6.

⁴ *Qui enim mortui sumus peccato, quomodo adhuc vivemus in illo?*—Ibid. 2.

⁵ *Christus linteamina in sepulchro reliquit; non ita Lazarus prodians cum sudario.*—Euseb. Emissen. de resurrect.

chase provisions; the latter, to stay there. Any one accustomed to the habits of seafaring people could say at once who have left the ship for good, and who intend returning to her; for the former are quite free, while the latter are chained, as a sign of their slavery.

Sinner, you who have at this Easter time confessed your sins and received holy Communion! tell me, in what manner have you risen from the death of sin? Like Christ, leaving behind you all the tokens of sin; or like Lazarus, still bound with the grave-clothes? Have you left the grave, as you would a ship, with all the marks of freedom about you; or do you still wear the chains on your limbs, as a sign of slavery? Are you unable to answer that question? And yet, you must know most about it; for, if you soon fall back into sin as before, if you again return to the galleys, to the slavery of the devil, you can look on it as a sure sign that in outward appearance you have risen from the grave of your sins, but you are still, like Lazarus, actually bound hand and foot with the marks of your slavery; and, therefore, that you are not really risen to life with Christ.

The contrary is the case with the relapsing sinner

Finally, the Gospel says, that whenever Our Lord appeared after His resurrection, He always stood: "Jesus stood in the midst of them,"¹ in order to show, as commentators remark, that a penitent who is truly converted must stand fast in the state of grace; and therefore, according to an old custom in the Catholic Church, when the bell rings three times a day during Easter time, the prayers are recited, not kneeling, but standing. The holy martyr, St. Justin, who lived in the first ages of the Church, asks the question: "whence arises that custom in the Church?"² Would it not be more becoming to pray to God and to His holy Mother on bended knees, than standing? No, he answers, it is not always more becoming; when we kneel, we signify thereby that we have fallen to earth by our sins, and therefore, during Paschal time, we stand, in order to show that by the resurrection of Christ and by penance we have risen from our unhappy fall, and, being awakened from the death of the soul, must now persevere in our good resolutions. Such, too, is the meaning of the words of the Apostle to the Galatians: "Stand fast, and be not held again under the yoke of bondage."³ And to the Philipians: "Therefore, my dearly beloved breth-

After His resurrection, Christ always appeared standing.

¹ Stetit Jesus in medio eorum.—Luke xxiv. 36.

² Unde talis in Ecclesia consuetudo?

³ Stete, et nolite iterum iugo servitutis contineri.—Gal. v. 1.

ren, and most desired, my joy and my crown: so stand fast in the Lord. And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,"¹ who stood amongst His disciples, and said to them: "Peace be to you."

The contrary is the case with the relapsing sinner.

On the other hand, it is a sure sign of wickedness to be always unsteady, as the Prophet David says: "The wicked walk round about."² He who walks round and round soon gets giddy and falls; or else he comes back to the place he started from. Inconstant Christian, who so easily fall into sin after confession, and run, as it were, in a circle from sin to confession, and confession to sin! learn from this that you are not of the number of the truly penitent, but rather of that of the wicked; and therefore your quick relapse into sin proves clearly that you are not really risen with Christ from the death of the soul; or, to leave similes aside, and to strike at the root of the matter, that, with all your confessions, you have not done true penance. And this is the second part of my sermon.

Second Part.

He who relapses into sin appears to have had none of those things that are required for true repentance.

True penance and the forgiveness of sin require, besides confession, when we have an opportunity of going, firstly, a real, supernatural sorrow and detestation of sin, and secondly, a firm resolution of amendment; and these are required on the part of him who does penance. On the part of God, it is necessary that He should give to the sinner thus repentant copious graces and helps in the sacrament of penance, in order to strengthen him to resist temptations, and to avoid sin in future. But if we consider the matter reasonably, as it is in itself, not one of these three things is to be found in him who speedily relapses into his former sins. I am not now speaking of venial sin, my dear brethren, and much less of those half voluntary daily faults and failings, into which people fall from human weakness, and from which even the holiest servants of God are not free. But that they who go to confession frequently in the month, and always come with the same sins and faults, since they have nothing else to confess, may be all the more certain of having a true sorrow and purpose of amendment, it is advisable that each time they should mention some sin of their past lives, and awaken sorrow

¹ *Itaque fratres mei carissimi et desideratissimi, gaudium meum et corona mea: sic state in Domino: et pax Dei, quæ exsuperat omnem sensum, custodiat corda vestra et intelligentias vestras.*—Philipp. iv. 1, 7.

² *In circuitu impij ambulant.*—Ps. xi. 9.

for it, as I have often said before. Neither is it my intention to assert that all those have not had true contrition, who after a considerable interval of time, during which they have kept in the grace of God, again fall now and then into their former grievous sins. Christian charity obliges me to pronounce a more favorable judgment in their case. No, penance does not confirm us in grace; that happiness is reserved only for the blessed in heaven, who never during all eternity can offend the God whom they love perfectly. But we, poor, frail mortals, as long as we are on this earth, exposed to so many temptations, dangers, and occasions of sin, if we are so firmly resolved to remain faithful to God that it seems an impossibility for us ever to provoke Him to anger, even then we must be filled with the spirit of humility and child-like fear, and be always on our guard, lest we should fall. Nor do I wish to say that it is always and in every case an infallible sign of a bad confession when one relapses into sin immediately after; for it may be that one who has truly repented is immediately afterwards exposed to an extraordinarily dangerous occasion, or that, through weakness and inconstancy, he changes his mind, and allows himself to be led into sin again. I am speaking only of those sinners who generally fall back into their former sins, after confession, and whose lives are an almost constant relapse; who, when the great feasts of the year come round, keep from sin for a few days, and go to the sacraments, but fall back again into their evil habits of cursing, swearing, drinking, injustice, and impurity. Of these I say, that, generally speaking, it is hardly probable that they have had a true sorrow and resolution of amendment, when they were making their confession, and that they have received the grace of God, along with the forgiveness of their sins, and the other helps of the sacrament. I will prove this in detail.

In the first place, then, all theologians are agreed that the sorrow required for true repentance must be in its intensity and efficacy necessarily “above everything,” *super omnia*; that is, it must surpass all sorrow which natural causes can inspire one with to such an extent, that nothing in the world can cause the reasoning will to have such sorrow as the offence offered to God by sin. To make this clearer, imagine the case of a young widow, who has but one, beautiful, dearly loved son; this child of hers is killed by some one; who can explain the grief of the mother’s heart at the cruel murder? The mere sight of the dagger that did the deed is enough to make her faint away; she cannot bear

For the sorrow required in repentance must be greater than all natural sorrow.

the sight of her son's blood-stained clothes, or of anything that can remind her of her misfortune. Her heart is ready to break with sorrow; she cannot pass by the place in which the crime was committed; the murderer's wife, his children, his servants, his friends, although they are quite innocent, are objects of such hatred to her, that she cannot bear to have anything to do with them. If she passes by his house, her blood runs cold; if she hears his name mentioned, she is ready to lose her senses with horror and grief. Perhaps, my dear brethren, that sorrow and grief is "above everything"? No, answer theologians; it is but a sensible and natural sorrow. The sorrow for sin which is required for penance must be much greater and more powerful. A rich merchant has sent all his goods to an agent in a foreign country; at an appointed time he sets out to receive his money, but he finds out that all his debtors have gone away and left the place without paying him. Thus the unfortunate man is reduced to beggary; he has neither goods, nor money, nor bread, nor counsel, nor hope; he tears his hair through sorrow and desperation; neither in heaven nor on earth can he find any consolation. This grief and sorrow, which torments him day and night, perhaps it is above all? Oh, no; it is like the other, a mere natural and sensible sorrow.

In its appreciative power.

Your sorrow and contrition, O sinner, whenever you come to the sacred tribunal of penance laden with mortal sin, must be in its intensity and efficacy, and in its appreciative power, far greater than that of the merchant and the mother; otherwise, it is of no avail for the forgiveness of sin. Mark well the words, "in its appreciative power;" for it is natural that the murder of her child should cause the mother to feel a more keen sensible sorrow, and the unexpected loss of his goods should affect the merchant in the same way. This sensitiveness is not required for the supernatural sorrow that one must have for sin; and yet I say that the latter must in its appreciative power and in its efficacy be greater than the former; that is, I must look on the loss of heaven as greater than the loss of all temporal goods in the whole world, and I must regret the death of my soul more than that of the dearest friends I have on earth; further, I must abhor offending God more than the worst accident that can happen to me in any way, more than any pain or trouble that can afflict me. My sorrow must be of such a kind that, if I were in the place of the mother or the merchant, and had it in my power either to prevent the murder or the loss, or to offend God by sin, by virtue

of my sorrow, I would prefer that the sin should not be committed, rather than the murder or the loss should be avoided; and if the sin were to be committed, that I would rather suffer any trouble, pain, and grief, than offend God by mortal sin.

Now I ask you, my dear brethren, is it likely that a man who is thus sincere in repenting of his sins should at once, at the first attack and without offering any opposition, relapse into the same sins that he has just repented of and detested? If the widow, whose grief at the death of her only son was so great that she could not bear to look at the murderer or at any one belonging to him, if she were to marry him after four, five, or six days, what would all sensible men think of her? They would say that she has either lost her reason, or that her sorrow was merely apparent and not real. Now, since the sorrow for sin must be much greater than the grief of that mother, nay, than all the natural sorrow of all men, tell me, O sinner, you who so easily fall back into your former sins after confession, and constantly alternate between sin and confession, confession and sin, can you persuade any reasonable man that you detested and hated your sins, when you were making your confession, with that powerful sorrow and contrition I have just described? You will never persuade me of it; I would not and could not believe it. Could you, perhaps, make the holy Fathers, Ambrose, Augustine, Bernard, Gregory, Jerome, believe it? Still less, for they say that a penitent of that kind is a mere juggler and trickster. Not even yourself, if you have common sense, could you persuade of such a thing, for your own conscience would contradict you, and show that you could not have had such a very earnest horror and detestation of your sins, since, otherwise, it would not be likely that you would fall so easily into them again. Nay, the very house, the amusement, the person, the drink, the company that led you into sin, would inspire you with horror and aversion, if your repentance were sincere. Alas! you would say, with a deep sigh, there, O my God, is the unhappy snare that caught me and led me astray from Thee! There is the place in which I lost heaven and its joys! There is the house in which I fell into the flames of hell! There is the company in which I sold my soul to the devil! O my God, what have I done? Have I not been mad and foolish? Such should be your thoughts. But instead of abhorring and avoiding them, you go back at once to that house, that company, that person, and commit the same sins over again, so that, in spite of your asseverations that you have repented of

Generally speaking, he who easily relapses has not had that sorrow.

your sins above every other evil, I do not believe you; your sorrow and repentance had not the qualities that are necessary to stamp them as genuine. Still less had you a firm purpose of amendment. Mark what I am about to say.

The purpose
of amend-
ment re-
quired for
confession.

The purpose required for true repentance must be a heart-felt, earnest one, far stronger than all other human resolutions; it must consist of a firm and general determination of the will not, under any circumstances or for any reason whatever, to offend God by mortal sin. The holy Fathers call it a vow, *votum*, by which a man binds himself, as it were on oath, to observe for the future the law of God inviolably. Nor does this purpose admit of any condition; that is, I must be prepared to resist sin, even if all the joys and pleasures of the world were enticing me to commit it; or if I could thereby gain all the treasures and riches of the world; or if all men were urging me to sin with the most severe threats. No matter how lasting or how important the allurements to sin may be, I must be firmly resolved, and that sincerely, rather to lose my wealth and property, my honor and good name, my health and life itself, and to undergo all possible torments, than consent to a single mortal sin; and this resolution must be general, that is, it must be for all future time, even if I had a thousand years of life still before me; it must be extended to all places and all circumstances, whether we can foresee them or not. It must be such a firm purpose, that I am determined to avoid all occasions and dangers which, as far as I can reasonably foresee, are likely to lead me into sin, and to use every means in my power in order not to sin again. If I have not this earnest resolution, my purpose, and therefore my repentance, have not the qualities they should have, and it would be better for me not to go to confession under the circumstances.

Nor has he
had that.

Now I ask again, is it likely, nay, is it possible that a man who has such a purpose will again abandon his God by sin at the first opportunity, at the least temptation, for the sake of gratifying some brutal passion, or for some worthless thing? Judge yourselves, my dear brethren, of the matter. Do you think that a penitent, who the day after he has been to confession, or a few days after, goes back to his former evil ways; or, what is still worse, always comes back to confession with the same mortal sins, without showing the least sign of improvement,—is it likely, I ask, that he has that firm purpose, that earnest determination never again to commit a mortal sin? For my part, I

do not believe that when he was reading the words of the purpose out of his prayer-book, or was repeating them by heart, he was really in earnest in what he was saying to God; at all events, no sensible man could find any sufficient reason for believing such a thing.

Suppose that in this town (as is unfortunately the case in many parts of our dear native land) the Lutherans or Calvinists were allowed as much freedom as Catholics in the practice of their false religion, and that they could hold their so-called divine service publicly (which will certainly never be tolerated by the inhabitants of Treves, whose bravery and constancy in defending the one, true, Catholic faith is attested from ancient times by the blood of countless martyrs), suppose, I say, that such were the case, and that the good God had given me the grace to convince a sensible and aged Lutheran of the truth of our religion, so that he made a public profession of faith in the church, before the assembled congregation, confessed his sins, and received the Blessed Eucharist, showing thereby that he was ready to live and die in the faith and to give his life for it, if necessary, truly I would congratulate him with all my heart. But three or four days after this public profession I find him again in the Lutheran church, after having thrown away his prayer-book and rosary, receiving the Lutheran communion, that is, a piece of bread. I wait until he comes out of the church, and say to him: "ah, my dear son, what is this? How is it that you have changed so suddenly? Have you forgotten what you so publicly professed a few days ago? How is it that I find you here now?" "Ah, Father," he exclaims, falling at my feet, "forgive me this time; I acknowledge that I have done wrong, and very wrong. My companions persuaded me to take this step. I am very sorry for it now, and I promise to be faithful during the rest of my life." And so he becomes a Catholic again. Four or five days later on I see him again going to the Lutheran church, and perjuring himself as before. Oh! I think; this is too bad; and I accuse him of acting dishonorably. "You have deceived and betrayed me," I say to him; "if the Catholic Church is the only true and infallible Church, in which alone salvation can be found, as you have recently acknowledged, why have you left it now, and that, too, in such a short time? And on the other hand, if you did not look on it as the true Church, why did you enter it?" "Ah, Father," he says again I must say that I have acted shamelessly; but I am heartily sorry.

Shown by a
simile.

for it; forgive me my inconstancy and weakness this once, and I will never have anything to do with Lutheranism again; I swear it most solemnly, and I renounce forever all false doctrine! Henceforth I will live as a good Catholic." But in spite of all this protestation, hardly four and twenty hours have elapsed, when he falls again as before; and thus he goes on for two, three, or more years, changing from Catholicism to Lutheranism, and from Lutheranism to Catholicism. Each time he renews his promise of fidelity, and as invariably breaks his word. What would you think of the promise of such a man, my dear brethren? Eh? you would say without hesitation, the fellow does not mean what he says; he never intended to be a Catholic; he was only wanting to play a trick on you. Such would be my opinion, too, and if he came to me a third time, I would refuse to listen to him.

**But shows
that he was
only mak-
ing a mock-
ery of God.**

Sinner, whenever you went to confession, you made a firm resolution, and publicly protested, before the Church and in the presence of God, that you would never again allow yourself to be separated from Him by mortal sin; you renounced your former wicked life, with the promise of beginning to live as a real Christian in future; and that promise you have, perhaps, renewed for many years. The priest, who did not rightly know you and your conscience, believed you at first, and looking on you as a true penitent, pronounced the words of absolution over you with much secret joy of heart, for he imagined that he had brought back a stray sheep to the fold, and had done a great work indeed. But, after the lapse of a few days, you broke your promise by committing the same sins over again; you went again to confession, repeated the same promises, and after a short time again perjured yourself. For the third, fourth, tenth time you said in confession that you would never sin again! I am sorry, you exclaimed, with my whole heart that I have offended God; henceforth I will show that I am a true servant of His; I would rather die a thousand times than offend Him again. But you never kept your word. And this change from sin to confession and from confession to sin has been going on now perhaps for some years. Is that the way you mock the almighty God? Do you think you can persuade Him that you have had a real, earnest purpose of amendment? No; no reasonable man could believe that, much less the all-seeing God. Arguing from the lamentable ease with which you relapsed into sin, it is evident that all your confessions were invalid, because you had not a

true and firm purpose of amendment, and therefore, which is the third and last proof of your false repentance, that you never obtained the forgiveness of your sins nor the helps and graces of the sacrament from God.

The effects of the sacrament of penance in souls that are properly disposed are, according to the teaching of theologians, besides sanctifying grace, which makes us friends and children of God, the copious helps and actual graces which our heavenly Father bestows on the souls of His beloved children, in order to make them terrible to the demon, so that he can no longer so easily attack and overcome them, and also to arm and strengthen those souls against their own evil inclinations and the temptations that assail them, so that they may easily overcome them. Hence the best advice to give one who has fallen into mortal sin through natural weakness and frailty is, not to defer repentance and confession for a long time, but as soon as possible to be sorry for his sin and to free his conscience from it by confession. For while a man is at enmity with God, he is like a fortress whose walls and fortifications are thrown down, and which has fallen into the possession of the devil, so that it is easy for the Evil Spirit to garrison it with as many soldiers of his as he pleases. The Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas of Aquin, expressly teaches that a mortal sin cannot long remain alone in the conscience, but keeps on attracting more and more to it; while, on the other hand, a soul in the state of grace and in the friendship of God can, in the midst of the most violent temptations and the greatest dangers, keep itself from sin far easier, than one in the state of sin can avoid committing a new sin, although the latter may be free from all assaults of temptation; and this on account of the great weakness and frailty which come from the loss of the grace and favor of God.

The effects of true penance are the graces of God, which help to overcome temptations.

From this certain fundamental truth I draw the following almost indisputable twofold conclusion: timid souls! who are so often filled with dread at the thought,—ah! am I really in the grace of God? Have I truly repented of all the sins of my past life, and confessed them as I ought? Ah! if I only knew that I was among the number of the friends and children of God! I have often and grievously sinned, and deserved hell-fire, of that I am certain; but whether my sins are forgiven or not, I cannot say; and this is what makes me anxious and uneasy. Hear what I am about to say; truly, I have not seen the great account-book of the almighty God, and no man can be infallibly certain as to

Therefore, they who keep from mortal sin for a long time have good proof that they are in the state of grace.

whether He is deserving of love or hatred; yet I can give you a probable, and, to speak of it humanly, an almost certain assurance in the matter which causes your anxiety. One thing only I ask you; have you or have you not continued to commit grievous sins? Answer that question honestly according to your conscience. If you say: no, Father, thanks be to God; I do my best to avoid mortal sin; months and years have now elapsed since I made a general confession of all my sins, and during that time I do not remember having deliberately committed a grievous sin; as far as I can, too, I avoid all dangerous occasions, and everything that could lead me into sin is an object of horror to me,—is that the case? Oh, then be of good heart, beloved souls! that is a good, and, as far as is possible on this earth, it is an infallible sign that you are in the grace of God! If no new sins have found room in your conscience, then the old ones are thrown out of it, and therefore you are beloved children and friends of God; you are in the state of grace. For if you were not, it would be most unlikely, humanly speaking, that you could keep so long from committing new sins. “Therefore, my dearly beloved, so stand fast in the Lord,” I say to you, in the words of the Apostle. Dearest brethren and sisters, only be constant in serving the Lord in that way, and love him most ardently.

On the other hand, they who easily relapse have an evident proof that they did not get the graces of the sacrament of penance.

But you, insensate sinners, who so easily relapse into your former sins after confession, and continually alternate between confession and sin, you, perhaps, will try to ascribe your relapse to human frailty and weakness; but what I fear, and am persuaded of, is this, that you have perhaps never really repented of your sins with a supernatural sorrow; these frequent relapses into sin are the consequences of your former misdeeds, which are in reality still on your conscience. “The sin,” says St. Gregory, “which is not blotted out by penance presently attracts another to it by its own weight;”¹ while St. Thomas says that “by the least grace one may resist all the attacks of concupiscence, and avoid all sin.”² Hence I conclude that you, who so easily relapse into your former sins, have neither the courage nor the power to overcome your evil inclinations, or to resist temptation; and, therefore, you have probably not received the grace of God in the sacrament of penance; you add sin to sin, and consequently your former sins are presumably still on your

¹ Peccatum quod poenitentia non deletur, mox suo pondere ad aliud trahit.

² Minima gratia potest resistere cuilibet concupiscentiæ, et vitare omne peccatum.

conscience; you do not find any effects of the sacrament of penance in your lives, and therefore your repentance was probably not a true but a false one. It certainly sometimes occurs that a man who has truly repented of and candidly confessed his sins, and so received the grace of the sacrament, again falls into his former sins; but it does not happen at once, nor at the first attack of temptation. It takes some time for such a deep-seated sorrow to be forgotten, and for that firm purpose and determination to be changed, so that the treasures of grace that God has bestowed in the sacrament lose their power. A man of that kind does not fall at once into mortal sin, but gradually loses devotion and zeal in the service of God; he becomes more and more careless, and ventures more recklessly into the dangerous occasions of sin, thus opening the door to the attacks of the devil. He falls a hundred times, but in small things; until his conscience becomes dulled, the good inspirations of God are neglected and despised, and at last, when the occasion is at hand, mortal sin is committed. But that within a week after doing penance, nay, sometimes on the very day after, mortal sin should be again admitted into the soul, in spite of its having been so heartily detested and repented of; that a man should at once become weak and perverse, as if the almighty God had never conquered his heart by grace, and that this change between confession and sin should grow into a sort of habit; I cannot for the life of me see how that can consist with true repentance preceding. No, no matter who you are, and what protestations you make, no one of common sense can believe, and it is, humanly speaking, impossible, that you have had a true sorrow for your sins, such as is required for the validity of the sacrament of penance. True contrition was wanting to you, as well as the firm purpose of amendment; nor have you received the graces that God is wont to give in the sacrament; your old sins are still on your conscience, and you have not freed yourself from the yoke and the slavery of the devil. Hence, if you have been in the habit of relapsing for years past, you have good reason, provided you wish to repent sincerely, to make a general confession of all your sins, mentioning also the number of times you have been to confession and holy Communion meanwhile, and taking good care to prepare yourself better than hitherto by exciting yourself to true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment.

But if, as I earnestly hope, you have in this Easter confession truly repented of and detested your sins, so that you are now

Conclusion
and resolu-

tion to be
constant in
good.

in the state of sanctifying grace and in the friendship of God, oh, what a great and priceless blessing it is for you that the long-suffering and merciful God has borne with you for so many years, and has at last admitted you to His favor! But now I beg of you, for the sake of that heaven in which you hope and desire one day to see and love God, your supreme Good, be steadfast for the future, and see that you do not, by relapsing into sin, turn the patient mercy of God into implacable hatred, so that you can have no hope of being again forgiven. This carefulness on your part and your efforts to avoid sin will be the surest sign that you have risen with Christ from the grave of sin, and by true penance have gained the freedom of the children of God, so that you will be able to rejoice as the disciples did when they saw the Lord, and to comfort yourself, as I shall show on a future occasion for the encouragement of those who persevere after having made a good confession, with the assurance that you will see the Lord in heaven, and rejoice with Him there forever. A blessing I wish you and myself from my heart. Amen.

FIFTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE WICKEDNESS OF THOSE WHO COMMIT SIN, BECAUSE THEY HOPE TO BE FORGIVEN IN CONFESSION.

Subject.

They who sin because they hope to be forgiven in confession are in evident danger of eternal damnation. For, 1. they hardly ever become really converted to God; 2. God will hardly ever give them the grace of true repentance.—*Preached on the twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Iratus dominus ejus, tradidit eum tortoribus.—Matt. xviii. 34.
“And his lord, being angry, delivered him to the torturers.”

Introduction.

This parable represents in a striking manner what takes place nowadays between God and the sinner. In the first place, the king grants his servant's humble prayer, and forgives him the

debt altogether : “ And the Lord of that servant, being moved to pity, let him go, and forgave him the debt.” There you have an image of the infinite goodness of God towards the sinner who returns to Him; for, at his first repentant prayer for forgiveness, and the humble confession of his sins, God blots out all the guilt of his sins, even if they were more numerous than the sands on the sea-shore, and forgets them forever. In the second place, how did the servant act after his lord had been so good to him? “ But when that servant was gone out, he found one of his fellow-servants that owed him a hundred pence, and laying hold of him, he throttled him, saying: Pay what thou owest.” What shameful conduct! But mark the inconceivable ingratitude of many sinners, who, depending on the goodness and mercy with which God is ready to receive them in the sacrament of penance, sin all the more boldly, instead of showing the greatest thankfulness to God, as I have said in my last sermon. “ Sin away,” they say, “ provided you only make a good confession afterwards.” Or else : “ what harm is it to commit sin? I can venture to do it, as I can go to confession afterwards, and God will then forgive me.” Or else, when they are already in the state of sin: “ I can go on a while longer, and the one confession will make all right by-and-by.” Thus they continually alternate between confession and sin, sin and confession, profaning the holy sacrament of penance by their wicked lives. Against those sinners I direct my sermon to-day; and I tell them beforehand that they will fare like the wicked servant in to-day’s gospel: “ And his lord, being angry, delivered him to the torturers;” such will be the fate of those sinners.

Plan of Discourse.

They who are in such dispositions, and sin because they have the intention of confessing their sins afterwards, are in the greatest and most evident danger of being delivered over by an angry God to the torturers, to their eternal damnation. And why so? Because they will never be really converted to God, as I shall show in the first part. Because God will hardly ever give them the grace of true repentance, as I shall show in the second part. My object is to warn those who are perhaps in error on this point, so that they may not find out their mistake too late.

Give us Thy light and grace thereto, O Holy Ghost; we beg this of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

He who sins because he hopes to be forgiven in confession does not understand what is required for true penance.

He who does not know what is required for a certain business will not perform it rightly. So, also, he who does not know nor understand what is necessary for true repentance and conversion to God will never be really converted, nor will he obtain forgiveness of his sins. Now, presumptuous man, who fall into grievous sin without scruple or shame, and at the same time think to yourself, I will commit this sin; it does not make much matter, as I can confess it afterwards; or, I have mortal sins on my conscience already, so I can go on for a while longer gratifying my passions, and then the one confession will make it all right; it comes to the same thing whether I have to say that I have committed the sin once or twenty times; and so you go on from one confession to another. Presumptuous man that you are, I ask you, do you know what is required for true repentance and conversion to God in the sacrament of penance? I believe you do not; for otherwise you would not act as you do. You think it is enough for you merely to confess your sins? If that were the case, although you act most dishonorably towards God by abusing, in order to offend Him further, the easy means He has appointed for the forgiveness of sin, you might have some chance of carrying out your plans, provided death does not anticipate you before you have time to make your confession. But you must know that the declaration of one's sins to the priest in confession is the least of the things that are required for true repentance, as we have seen already.

The most necessary condition is true sorrow.

That which is most necessary for the sinner to be really converted, and to obtain forgiveness of his sins, is contrition and sorrow for his sins; and as I have often told you, and cannot too often repeat, that sorrow must be sincere from the bottom of the heart; it must proceed from a supernatural motive; it must be extended to every mortal sin, without exception; in its strength and efficacy it must surpass all other natural sorrow, and sin must be hated far more than any earthly evil that one can suffer under any circumstances; it must include also a firm purpose and determination of the will rather to endure all the miseries of the world than to offend God again by one mortal sin. Do you now understand what it is? And do you firmly believe that sorrow of that kind is necessary for repentance and a good confession; or that, seeing the way in which you have been going on, sinning in the hope of obtaining pardon in the sacrament of penance, you have always had that sorrow when you went to confession; or that you will have such a sorrow the next

time you go to confession? Say what you will, I do not think any of these three things is, humanly speaking, possible.

For, in the first place, do you believe that such a sorrow is required for the validity of your confession? If so, you act against all the laws of common sense, and are utterly incapable of having a sorrow of the kind, when you say to yourself, I will commit this sin, or I will continue committing it, as I can confess and repent of it afterwards. What is the meaning of that? Is it not the same as saying, I will sin and be sorry afterwards that I have sinned? I will sin, and afterwards my sin shall cause me greater grief than if I had lost everything I possess, or had become blind and lame, or were exposed to the ridicule of the whole world, or had to suffer all the torments that man can bear. I will sin, and afterwards I will wish with all my heart that I had died a sudden death before sinning. I will sin, and be so sorry for it afterwards, that I would wish to shed my blood even, if by so doing I could recall the time in which I offended God, and undo what I have done. That is the meaning of your conduct. And is it not foolish and devoid of common sense? Who ever heard a man say, I will throw myself down from the top of this wall and break my arms and legs; but afterwards I will be sorry for my folly, and will condemn it with bitter tears, and will send for an experienced doctor to heal my wounds? I will set fire to my house, but will regret afterwards that I have done so, and, with great expense, will build a new one. I will marry that notorious, wicked woman: and afterwards will wish sincerely that I had never seen her. Would not any one look on a man who speaks in that way as a fool fit for Bedlam? But such and even greater is the folly you are guilty of, O sinner! when you commit mortal sin, because you think that you will afterwards be able to repent of and confess it.

He does not believe that, or else he acts foolishly.

Again, do you believe that, considering your mode of action, you are able to awaken that true sorrow and repentance, as I have described it, or that you will be able to awaken it later on? And what will be your motives? What have they been hitherto? It is well known that the sorrow for sin is twofold, namely, perfect and imperfect. Perfect sorrow comes from a perfect love of God, arising from the knowledge given us by faith that God is of and in Himself the infinite and supreme Good, and of Himself is worthy of infinite love and esteem. and therefore it grieves us above all things that we have offended such a God

He has no motive to excite himself to true contrition.

who is worthy of all love. Imperfect sorrow comes either from the fear of God, whose strict justice we dread, because faith teaches us that He has threatened to punish even one mortal sin with hell fire; and therefore it grieves us above all things to have ever despised, by transgressing His commands, a God who punishes so justly and so severely; or else it comes from the recollection of the many benefits God has bestowed on us, and from the hope of an exceeding great reward in the life to come, which we know we lose by committing mortal sin; and therefore it grieves us above all things that we have been so ungrateful to our good God, and have bartered away the eternal joys of heaven for some wretched thing; or else it arises from the consideration of the deformity of sin, which inspires us with such horror, that we wish from our hearts rather to suffer death or any other evil, than again to be guilty of sin. None of these motives is capable of exciting you to be truly sorry for your sins and to detest them; because you do not love God sincerely, nor fear Him as you ought, nor do you acknowledge the benefits you have received from Him, nor do you esteem as you should and must the rewards He has promised, nor have you a horror of sin.

For he neither loves God, nor fears Him, nor has a horror of sin.

You do not love your God; for from one confession to another you thrust Him out of your heart, without fear or shame, for some miserable thing, and that with the deliberate intention that He shall afterwards love you and admit you to His friendship. You love your God as little as the wicked son loves his father when he attacks him with a drawn sword, saying at the same time, I will now inflict a mortal wound on you, and afterwards I shall regret it with all my heart, because I shall then love you more than any one in the world. You do not fear your God nor the punishments He has threatened; for you offend and insult Him most recklessly, because you think and hope He will not punish you, but be reconciled with you each time you go to confession. Imagine that I am standing on a high tower, holding you fast to a pillar, and saying to you with a threatening countenance, wretched man! be careful not to say a single word against me! I have you now in my power; if I let you go, you will fall down and break your neck; and that will certainly be your fate, if you utter the least syllable to displease me, or show the least sign of contempt towards me. But meanwhile you laugh and mock at my threats, you struggle against me and even spit in my face. Could any one say that you are really afraid of me? Oh! you exclaim, I am behaving in this way only

for a short time; afterwards I will act more respectfully towards you, and you will not let me fall. Ah, rash man, you are only making a fool of me; you are not at all afraid of me! Even so little do you fear your God, O rash sinner! Even so little do you dread His justice. At all times, in all places, He has you in His hand, holding you over the abyss of hell, and giving you due warning that, if you transgress His law and offend Him grievously, He will open His hand and let you fall. But all that does not make you a whit afraid. I laugh at you, is the answer you give Him by your actions; I will now offend you, and trample your law under foot, but afterwards I will atone for the insult. Thus you have not the least fear of His punishments. Nor do you regard His rewards or benefits, for you barter the eternal joys of heaven for a worthless thing, and contemptuously reject God Himself, in spite of the benefits He has hitherto bestowed on you, consoling yourself meanwhile with the hope that, when you go to confession, He will again give you that priceless blessing, the forgiveness of your sins, and will make you His dear friend. And, finally, you have no horror of sin on account of its innate deformity, for you are continually defiling yourself with it, intending afterwards to cleanse your soul from its filth. So that there is no motive capable of arousing in you a true sorrow, and since you go on from one confession to another, saying, I will commit this sin, and confess it afterwards, you are hardly ever capable of having a real sorrow and of being truly converted to God.

But suppose your presumptuous hope is realized, for the human will may change at any moment; suppose that, moved by some special light to a real love or fear of God, you repent of your sins, and make a good confession, how long will your conversion last? As I presume, you will never really and constantly amend your sinful ways, seeing how you have for such a long time profaned the sacrament of penance; for, on the one hand, by frequent relapses into sin, your evil habits grow stronger and stronger, and make it easier for you to fall again; and on the other hand, the demon gets more power over you on account of the weakening of your spiritual strength, so that repentance and conversion become more and more difficult for you. As I said when commencing to speak of this subject, by a good confession the penitent recovers all he had lost by sin, so that the merciful God takes away all guilt from his soul, and makes him just as rich in merits and graces as he was before his fall; but, as we

By repeated
sins he ac-
quires bad
habits.

must not forget, and as experience unfortunately reminds us every day, the relics of sin still remain, although we have done penance with all our hearts; that is, besides the punishment still due to our sins, there are the strong and evil inclinations that impel man to sin, and that grow stronger and stronger the more the sinful habit is indulged in. Hence it is no wonder if a great sinner is tempted far more violently to commit his habitual sins after he has made a good confession, than before his conversion, and while he was still in the state of sin.

Which at
last bring
him to final
impeni-
tence.

And now, rash man, who heap sin on sin, depending on the chance of making a good confession, how will you be able to resist to the end the effects of inveterate habit, and those inclinations which, being already implanted in your nature, have acquired additional violence by long indulgence; how will you be able to resist them, even supposing that you are truly converted and make a good confession? Ah, innocent and pious servants of God, who have never tasted forbidden pleasure, are often obliged to scourge themselves even to blood, in order to avoid giving consent to impure temptations! And how can you promise yourself a victory over them, after all the time you have spent between sin and confession, confession and sin, making a second nature out of your evil habits? How will you be able to overcome them, when the devil will come with his suggestions and temptations, thus strengthening your natural inclinations to sin? "Promising them liberty," says St. Peter in his Second Epistle, "whereas they themselves are the slaves of corruption: for by whom a man is overcome, of the same also he is the slave."¹ The oftener, O sinner, you have allowed yourself to be overcome by the devil, the more are you enslaved by him, the greater the command he has over you and your evil desires; and what will that lead to? To what the Apostle speaks of in the same place: "For if, flying from the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they be again entangled in them, and overcome, their latter state is become unto them worse than the former."² I will commit sin, you say to yourself, and afterwards I will repent of and confess it; or, I will gratify my passions this once, and then one confession will make it all right. Ah! all that is nothing but a

¹ Libertatem illis promittentes, cum ipsi servi sint corruptionis: a quo enim quis superatus est, hujus et servus est.—II. Pet. II. 19.

² Si enim refugientes coinquinaciones mundi in cognitione Domini nostri et Salvatoris Jesu Christi, his rursus implicati superantur: facta sunt eis posteriora deteriora prioribus. (Ibid. 20.)

deceit of the Evil One! Do not trust him, poor mortal! The crafty tempter acts like a general who, having obtained permission to pass through the enemy's country with one or two companies of soldiers, promising to remain but a day or two, as soon as he has effected an entry, fortifies himself and is not easily dislodged. So the devil, our sworn enemy, seems to be satisfied in the beginning if we grant him simply a right of way; that is to say, he suggests to a man that he ought to try this pleasure; he can repent of it afterwards; and if the suggestion is acted on, he persuades his victim to try the same pleasure once more, trusting again in a future confession. But, poor soul, you must be on your guard! or else he will bring matters so far with his suggestions that, keeping fast hold of you as his bond-slave, he will at last cause you to die impenitent, so that all your confessions and all the penance you intended doing will be of no avail to you.

A terrible incident is recorded in the English Annals by the Bishop of Syraeuse. A young man, who was addicted to the vice of impurity, and was continuing recklessly in sin, trusting to obtaining pardon in the sacrament of penance, was suddenly overtaken by a grievous illness. He thought it was then high time for him to carry into effect his long deferred intention of repenting, and to declare his sins in confession; and he actually did so. (O good God! how great Thy mercy and goodness, since Thou dost not reject the sinner even at the last moment!) So heartfelt was his sorrow, so bitter the tears with which he confessed his sins, so earnest his devotion in receiving the last sacraments, so continual his sighs of sorrow and love of God, that no one of those who were around him but felt a sort of holy envy towards him and wished that he, too, could die such a good death. There was no doubt entertained of his salvation. After his death the soul of the young man appeared to one of his nearest relations, and said, with horrible howls of despair, that it was in hell. His friend, surprised at this unexpected news, asked in amazement how that was possible. "Did you not," he said, "make a good confession?" "Yes," answered the soul; "my confession was good." "Perhaps you had not a true sorrow?" "My sorrow was heartfelt and sincere, was the reply; not the least thing was wanting to my repentance; all my sins were washed away by it, and I was a dear child and friend of God, expecting the heavenly glory that belonged to me by right; but, alas, unhappy me! just before I breathed my last, the devil represent-

Shown by
an example.

ed to my imagination the carnal pleasures I had so frequently enjoyed, and through force of habit I consented to a desire for them, whereupon I immediately breathed my last and was condemned to hell."

Therefore
he will
hardly ever
truly re-
pent.

Think of this, O sinner! If the long-continued and inveterate habit of sin and the temptations of the devil have such power that they can lead again into mortal sin a man who had just repented perfectly of his sins and detested them, a man whom illness had deprived of all bodily strength, a man who was on the threshold of eternity and was about to enter heaven; what sort of conversion and amendment can you hope to have after that confession on the strength of which you now go on adding sin to sin? For, you are still strong and healthy; you are in the midst of temptations, outward as well as inward, and are surrounded by occasions of sin; you do not even dream of death as yet, and therefore you sin without scruple, because you hope to be able to confess your sins later on. Oh, no! if you go on in that way you can hardly ever hope to be truly converted and to amend your wicked life. Nay, even if you happen to make your confession with a good will, as a general rule the good God will not give you the grace of true repentance, so that your conversion will not be real, and your sins will not be forgiven, owing to your presumption, which has made it, humanly speaking, impossible for you to enjoy the benefit of the sacrament, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

And even if
he wished
for it, he
will hardly
receive
from God
the extra-
ordinary
grace of
true re-
pentance.

I base what I am now about to say on that truth, that article of faith, which I explained some time ago, when I showed that the sinner who wishes to be converted must humbly and fervently pray to God for help; for man, by his own unassisted strength, can do no supernaturally good work, and much less can he free himself from the state of sin, repent of his evil deeds, and do penance as he ought, unless God helps him by preventing and co-operating grace. This is the first point for which I claim your attention. This preventing and co-operating grace, which is necessary for true repentance, God is not bound to give to any sinner after the latter has abandoned and grievously offended Him; and furthermore, He can withdraw all other graces and helps as He pleases, so that the sinner, according to his deserts, must necessarily be lost forever. This is the second point. Further, the greater the malice and number of sins that one

has committed, and the more inveterate his habit of sinning, so also the greater, more powerful, and extraordinary must be the helps and graces he receives from God in order to be converted; and consequently the less, too, is God obliged to help him in such a special manner. This is the third point. Do you understand this clearly, presumptuous man, when you sin without scruple, and heap sin on sin, trusting to a future confession? How can you reasonably hope that God will give you such a special grace of repentance, I do not say every time you go to confession, but at any time at all? No, that is not likely; for, you neither deserve that grace, nor is it becoming, so to speak, for God to give it you.

In the first place, you do not deserve that grace, but rather compel the just God to withdraw it from you. It is generally acknowledged amongst men in the world that he who is ungrateful to his benefactor deserves to be deprived of the benefits he has received; and much more so if he has misused those benefits to insult and injure his benefactor. Thus, for instance, a thief who has robbed the church can find no refuge in it from arrest. But that is the special feature of your sin, when you offend God relying on the hope of a future confession. The holy sacrament of penance is founded on the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and is instituted as a special benefit and a necessary help for us poor, frail mortals, by means of which, if we commit a mortal sin, we can free ourselves from it, and more easily avoid a relapse; but you abuse this very benefit as a reason and a means of sinning all the more shamelessly and of offending God, your sovereign Benefactor. For, if there was no confession, if you knew for certain that, should you commit a grievous sin, there is no means of freeing your conscience from it, you would surely be more on your guard against mortal sin, and would not allow yourself to be so easily overcome by temptation; since, however, the good and merciful God has appointed this easy means of procuring pardon, you condemn Him without scruple and add sin to sin. I will commit sin, you think, because I can tell it in confession afterwards; that is to say, I will offend my God, because He has given me a means of freeing myself from the state of sin; I will offend my God, because He will forgive me afterwards. In a word, your meaning is: I will despise my God, and defy Him, because He is so good and merciful that He will afterwards receive me into His grace and friendship. Is not that making an abuse of the benefit to insult the Benefactor?

For he
makes him-
self utterly
unworthy of
it.

And pre-
sumptuous-
ly relies on
it.

And yet you expect from the God whom you treat so shamefully such a great benefit? On what do you found this presumptuous hope of yours? The holiest friends of God were often obliged to beg for years and years before obtaining certain favors from Him. The great Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul, a chosen vessel of the Holy Ghost, prayed, while constantly chastising and mortifying his body, for the grace to be freed from the assaults of the flesh; and yet, as he himself acknowledges, he did not receive it. Pious souls, who seek for nothing in the world but to please God more and more, and to fulfil His holy will in all things, how long have they not to pray sometimes for a certain virtue, such as angelic purity, patience under adversity, love of crosses and humiliations, before they obtain from God the favor they long for so earnestly? And you, shameless sinner! after having so audaciously and for such a long time abused the benefits of God, the holy sacrament of penance, to heap sin on sin, you are not afraid to promise yourself that you will obtain a far greater favor, namely, the grace of true repentance, whenever you may be pleased to accept it! A grace that must be an extraordinarily powerful one, to enable you to be truly converted! A grace of which you are more unworthy than all other sinners! And God must be ready at your nod and beck, to prepare for you a grace that He is bound to give to no man who has sinned mortally even once and through frailty! No! no! pearls are not to be cast before swine in that way. It is true that the mercy of God in receiving sinners is exceeding great; but He has not entrusted it to any one to do with it what he likes, as you seem to be presumptuous enough to imagine; for you act as if you had a document in your possession assuring you of the grace of conversion whenever you are willing to claim it. But that is not the case: "I will have mercy on whom I will," said God to His servant Moses, "and I will be merciful to whom it shall please Me."¹ To you, I say, He will not at all times give the grace of true repentance, since you make a bad use of it to commit sin; nay, He cannot, so to speak, give it to you, as a general rule, for that would not be becoming His infinite Majesty.

And, as a
general
rule, it is
unbecom-
ing the Al-
mighty to
give such a

I repeat that our God is infinitely generous; His goodness and mercy have neither limit nor end, and the treasures of His grace are inexhaustible, that is true (blessed forever be Thy mercy, O good God!); but it is also infallibly certain that He dispenses His favors with the greatest judgment, as becomes such a great

¹ Miserebor, cui voluero, et clemens ero in quem mihi placuerit.—Exod. xxxiii. 19.

Lord, and always with a view to His own honor and glory, that men may praise and magnify Him all the more. Moreover, He wishes that His benefits should be recognized and prized, as is only just; and for this reason He often refuses for a long time to grant the favors asked of Him by His holiest servants, in order that they may attach more value to them; for what is easily procured is, generally speaking, little valued. He has decreed an eternal punishment for every mortal sin, so that the fear of it may act as a check on men, to keep them from offending Him, and to make them be faithful in His service. Now, all this would go for nothing, if God, as a general rule, were to give the grace of true repentance and conversion to those who go on sinning because they hope to be able to confess their sins afterwards; for, what would become of the public honor and glory of God in the world in that case? Would He not seem to expose Himself and His honor to mockery and contempt? Who would value the grace of repentance and forgiveness, if it were to be had whenever one wishes, even after it has been shamefully abused? Who would fear the fire of hell, if every one could say, hell is not for me, I can sin as much as I please, and tomorrow, or the next day, confess my sins, so that I need not fear hell?

And what wicked lives the impious would then lead in the world! How infidels would mock and despise God! What scandal would be given the innocent! What cause for murmurs and complaints the good and righteous would have, at seeing the kingdom of heaven thrown before swine, that is, offered at such a cheap price to those who are wantonly wicked, while they themselves have to work so hard for it, and not even then can get rid of the fear of losing it! What would they think if they saw that others could indulge their passions without restraint, trusting to a future confession? Eh? Religious might say: what is the use of our shutting ourselves up in a convent? Why do we bury ourselves in the desert to avoid the occasions of sin? To what purpose do we fast and pray so much? What is the good of our constant mortification in order to keep our unruly flesh in subjection? We should live like other men, and indulge our sensuality! And if we now and then fall in grievous sin, what harm is that? We can confess it so easily! Nay, we may sin for the third, the tenth, the hundredth time; all we have to do is to go to confession the third, the tenth, or hundredth time; the good and merciful God will give us the grace of true

grace to
such a man.

For it would
be an en-
couragement
for
people to
lead bad
lives.

repentance as often as we wish; there is no difficulty about it. Indeed? You had better try if such is really the case, (yet I do not mean you to take this as advice), and see whether things will always turn out as you say! For I can assure you that the contrary is the case, and that the just God, as a general rule, cannot give the grace of true repentance to such sinners. "Be not deceived," is the warning given by St. Paul, "God it not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap." Have you sinned against the divine commands, even grievously, even for year after year? No matter, only return with confidence; repent sincerely and confess your sins; the merciful God does not desire the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live forever. But to rely on this confession and this mercy of God, in order to sin all the more boldly, because there is such an easy means at hand as the sacrament of penance, and God is always ready to forgive the sinner, that, I say, is a presumption that the God of justice and holiness cannot bear; His honor and glory and the welfare of souls are concerned in the matter, and He must refuse such sinners the grace of true repentance.

Therefore
he will prob-
ably be re-
jected.
Shown by a
simile.

It will be with them, as the royal Prophet foretold: "They shall return at evening, and shall suffer hunger like dogs, and shall go round about the city."¹ Mark the comparison, my dear brethren; dogs, when they find the door open in the morning, run out at once; they play, and jump about, and fight with each other, and carry on their games all over the town, till evening. Sometimes, indeed, they come home, when they find the door open and see the table laid; but, as soon as they have swallowed a mouthful, they are away again, until nightfall, when they return; and if they happen to find the door closed, they bark and howl their loudest in order to get admittance; but their master is too sensible to pay any attention to the noise they make; he lets them howl away until they are tired, so that they have to suffer the pangs of hunger all night on the doorstep. "They shall suffer hunger like dogs." There you have a picture of the unhappy state of those sinners of whom I am speaking. They see the door of God's mercy open for them in the holy sacrament of penance, which is a necessary and at the same time an easy means for them to be reconciled to God and to blot out their sins; but what do they do? They run about wildly all the days of their

¹ Nollite errare: Deus non irridetur. Quæ enim seminauerit homo, hæc et metet.—Gal. vi. 7, 8.

² Convertentur ad vesperam, et famem patientur ut canes, et circuibunt civitatem.—Ps. lvi. 7.

lives, falling from one sin into another; sometimes they come back and confess their sins, but after confession they recommence their wicked lives as before. But let them have their way; "they shall return at evening;" when the day is past, and the night, that is, the end of their lives is drawing nigh, then they will wish to return as usual; but, "they shall suffer hunger like dogs;" they will fare like the foolish virgins in the Gospel, who wished to return to the marriage feast after having purchased oil for their lamps; the door of grace will be closed against them. "Lord, Lord, open to us;"¹ they will exclaim; but the only answer they will get, will be, "I know you not."² "Without are dogs;"³ outside the door, with those dogs, who have wasted the day of grace, and have made a mockery of Me, "they shall suffer hunger like dogs."

"Be not deceived," is my conclusion in the words of St. Paul; "God is not mocked." Do not make the mistake of being too confident, O sinner! God will not long suffer you to mock Him. At all events, do not be so presumptuous as to find a foundation and a reason for your wickedness in the salutary and necessary means that the goodness and mercy of God has provided for the forgiveness of your sins. For, if you abuse even the holy sacrament of penance to help you in your wickedness, what can you expect to find salvation in at last? Ah, my dear Lord and God, I have often hitherto been guilty of this presumption and audacity; for I have thought to myself, what does it matter? I can sin a little longer; one confession will make all right afterwards. I acknowledge. O Lord, that I am altogether unworthy of the grace of forgiveness. Still, infinitely good and merciful God, grant me mercy and grace this once! I have never before realized the injustice and presumption of which I have been guilty, as I do now; I repent with my whole heart of it. The confession, which I am now seriously resolved to make, after diligent preparation, shall, with Thy grace, be the end of my sins! I shall never more say, as formerly, I will commit this sin now and confess it afterwards, but I shall firmly resolve to do my best not to offend in the least by any deliberate sin the infinitely good and merciful God, who in spite of my countless offences has again admitted me to His grace and friendship. Him shall I serve henceforth with all my strength; never shall I

Exhortation
and resolve
never to sin,
relying on
confession.

¹ Domine, domine, aperi nobis.—Matt. xxv. 11.

² Nescio vos.—Ibid. 12.

³ Foris canes.—Apoc. xii. 15.

forget the great and undeserved mercy shown me, for which I will ever praise and bless God during the time that still remains to me on this earth; and afterwards, as I hope and trust, I will continue to praise Him for all eternity in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

MOTIVES AND MEANS OF PERSEVERING IN GOOD AFTER PENANCE.

FIFTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF PERSEVERANCE.

Subject.

Perseverance in good after penance is the surest sign and means of rising once with Christ to eternal glory.—*Preached on the second Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Videt lupum venientem, et dimittit oves, et fugit.—John x. 12.
“He seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and flieth.”

Introduction.

It is not right for a shepherd to run away at the moment when his presence is most required for the safety of his flock. Nor is it right for a sheep to leave the flock at the approach of the wolf, to wantonly separate itself from the watchful shepherd and to run into the jaws of the ravening wolf, at the moment when it should most of all remain at its shepherd's side. Foolish and stray sheep of the kind, my dear brethren, are those penitents who, after having laid aside the burden of their sins in the sacrament of penance run away from God again at the first assault of temptation, go back to their sins, and thus fall again into the jaws of the hellish wolf. I have shown recently that to relapse quickly and through habit into one's former sins is generally a sign that one did not really rise with Christ from the death of sin to the life of grace, and did not do true penance. Constancy in good is the best proof of

that moral resurrection from death to the life of grace. To encourage us still further to this constancy, I say now :

Plan of Discourse.

Perseverance in good after penance is the surest sign and means of rising once with Christ to eternal glory. Therefore he who earnestly desires to go to heaven must never run back to his former sins. There you have the whole subject of this sermon.

Christ Jesus, true Shepherd of our souls ! impel us all to this perseverance in Thy holy service ; we ask this of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

The surest
sign of pre-
destination
is persever-
ance in
good.

That which causes the greatest trouble and anguish to souls who are really desirous of salvation is the inscrutable secret of eternal predestination to glory, and the constant uncertainty as to whether God has elected us for heaven, or whether we are to be among the number of the reprobate. On the great day of the general judgment we shall all rise again from the dead, as our faith infallibly teaches us ; but whether I shall stand on the right side of the Judge, with the sheep of the fold of Christ, or on the left hand, amongst the accursed goats that belong to the devil ; whether I shall rise with the former to eternal glory, or with the latter to eternal damnation, that is and will remain completely hidden from us all during this life. This it is that often forces people to sigh : ah ! if I only knew what will become of me during eternity ! If I were only certain of being amongst the elect ! Providence of God ! we adore Thee with the most profound humility ! Thou hast ordained everything well and wisely ! To Thee be honor and glory, since it is Thy wish to keep that secret from us ! And how mild and merciful Thou art therein towards the wicked ! What a wretched, miserable state would theirs be, if they knew beforehand that they would be lost forever ! And how wisely and advantageously Thou actest therein towards the just and pious ! For, otherwise, what would become of Christian humility, of child-like fear, of watchfulness and modesty, of horror of sin, of zeal in Thy holy service, if the good were already sure of their eternal salvation ? No, my dear brethren, that knowledge would not be good for any one. Let us, then, take to heart, encourage, and console ourselves with that exhortation of the Apostle : “ Wherefore, brethren, labor the more, that by good works you may make sure your calling and election ; for so an entrance shall be ministered to you abun-

dantly into the everlasting kingdom of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”¹ Still, there are different signs from which we may reasonably conclude, nay, from which we may derive a human certainty and assurance that we shall rise to eternal glory. I will explain them more in detail as occasion offers. Meanwhile, one of them is, and one of the chief of them, as St. Augustine says, “to hear the word of God willingly.”² But all those signs of predestination, whatever their name may be, are, according to theologians, so called, because they help man in a special manner to persevere in good and to be constant and zealous in the divine service. From this I conclude that perseverance and constancy in good that one has begun to do is of itself the surest sign of a future resurrection to everlasting glory.

And to go to the root of the matter, in the first place, this perseverance places a man, even during this life, in almost the same state as that in which the glorified bodies of the blessed will be in heaven. For, in what does their exceeding great happiness consist? Amongst other perfections is the fact that they are immortal, incapable of suffering or corruption, and not subject to any change; their life, glory, and happiness will last as long as God is God; and as they are to-day, so they will be for all eternity, as St. Paul writes of the glorious body of Jesus Christ after the resurrection, which the bodies of the just and elect will resemble on the last day. There you have a true picture of a just man, who never offended God by a mortal sin, and also of a converted sinner, who, after having done penance, remains constant in his good resolutions, and has still the same earnest will to observe eternal fidelity to his God. Human respect, that frightens so many from good! vain usages and deceitful maxims of the perverse world, that find as many adorers as if they were gods! point of honor, for the sake of which so many give up their lives as well as their souls! money and wealth, for which so many sell themselves to the devil! vile pleasures of the flesh! impure love of creatures, that bewitches the hearts of most men! you are the lords and masters of the children of the world, who, according to your good will and pleasure, change a thousand times a day, like a fragile reed that is blown hither and thither by the wind; and you can move your

So that it places a man almost in the same state as the blessed in heaven.

¹ Quapropter, fratres, magis satagite ut per bona opera certam vestram vocationem et electionem faciat: sic enim abundanter ministrabit vobis introitus in æternum regnum Domini nostri, et Salvatoris Jesu Christi.—II. Pet. i. 10, 11.

² Libenter audire verbum Dei.

subjects to anger and displeasure, to trouble and impatience, to immoderate joy, to love and hatred; to-day you fill them with exultation, to-morrow with despair; and you drive them on to all sorts of vice. But with the servant of God you can do nothing! For he has once for all firmly resolved, no matter what happens, to keep the faith he has sworn to the God whom he loves, and never to depart from Him by a deliberate sin. This is his firm determination, and what he is to-day in that respect he was yesterday, and will be to-morrow what he is to-day. "Who, then, shall separate us from the love of Christ?"¹ he can say with St. Paul; neither joy, nor sorrow, nor hunger, nor thirst, nor honor, nor disgrace, nor life, nor death; no man in the world will be so dear to me, no pleasure so enticing, no wealth or riches so great, as to induce me to do anything against God and what I owe Him. Temptations, horrible and formidable though you be, come upon me if you choose; you will never find the least place in my heart! My chief refuge and help against your attacks will be that God who is everywhere present, and whom I am resolved to serve till the end of my life. I am ready to die a thousand times, rather than consent to a single mortal sin; and I am assured that my God will not forsake me, provided I only remain faithful to Him and His service, as I am now determined to do. Oh, truly happy the state of one who, while still on earth, is an emblem of the unchanging state of the glorified bodies of the blessed in heaven!

Hence, he who is constant in good can already count himself amongst the elect.

This is the reason why St. Cyprian congratulates so heartily those Christian virgins who devote themselves entirely to the service of Jesus Christ. Chosen souls, he says to them, "already in this life you possess the glory of the resurrection,"² which you expect in the life to come. The chastity you have publicly vowed to God to observe forever already effects in your souls something like what the future resurrection will effect in the bodies of the saints and chosen children of God. Your constancy in the love of your heavenly Bridegroom, whom you have chosen, already begins to portray in you that which the future glory of heaven will perfect! And the same words I say to you, Christians, whoever you may be, "if you be risen with Christ"³ to a life of persevering piety; if you are now really, earnestly, and firmly resolved to keep henceforth on the right

¹ Quis ergo nos separabit a caritate Christi?—Rom. viii. 35

² Vos resurrectionis gloriam in hoc sæculo jam tenetis.

³ Si consurrexistis cum Christo.—Col. iii. 1.

way, on which you have entered by penance; to you I say, with St. Cyprian, this constancy of yours in the service of God, or your earnest resolve to persevere in good, is one of the surest signs which, according to St. John, will be marked on the foreheads of the elect in heaven. Rejoice, then, in the Lord: you possess already in this world a share of that glory which will adorn your bodies forever in heaven!

But you, "changeable Christians,"¹ as St. Prosper calls you with reason; you who are like the moon, ever changing, who always run round in the same circle to your former state, which you had left; who are constantly alternating between confession and sin, and hardly ever amend your lives after repentance; what, I ask, have you to expect? I will tell you straight out, though I pity and compassionate your poor souls: you have reason to fear, nay, it is probable, that you are not amongst the number of those who on the last day will rise with Christ to glory, and, therefore, that you will have no share in His kingdom. If I venture to prophesy this to you on my own authority alone, you would have good reason for attaching slight credence to it, and for appealing to a more reliable source of information; but it is the Apostle St. Jude, speaking as the infallible mouthpiece of the Holy Ghost, who assigns to you your place in eternity. "Wandering stars," such are his words, "to whom the storm of darkness is reserved forever."² Our Saviour Himself, in the Gospel of St. Luke, excludes you from heaven, when He says to him who wishes to bid adieu to his friends before following Him, "No man putting his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."³

But he who easily relapses into sin must look on himself as among the reprobate.

And how else could it be? is the question asked by St. John Chrysostom on these words. How can an inconstant, dissolute, unfaithful man be apt for the kingdom of God, since he is not of any value even for the world? No private individual would keep a servant in his house, unless he can rely on his fidelity. How could you entrust with an important business a man who is of an inconstant disposition, who is one way to-day, and another to-morrow, so that you can never be sure of him? No, a man of that kind is looked on as a good-for-nothing even by the world, that is otherwise foolish enough in its judgments. How,

Shown by similes.

¹ *Temporarii Christiani.*

² *Sidera errantia, quibus procella tenebrarum servata est in eternum.—Epist. Judæ, 13.*

³ *Nemo mittens manum suam ad aratrum, et respiciens retro, aptus est regno Dei.—Luke*

then, could the God of infinite majesty tolerate in His kingdom a servant who to the same thing says a hundred times "yes," and a hundred times "no;" who is full of promises that he never fulfils; who serves him to-day, and to-morrow will take sides with the devil? No one who looks back, and returns to his old ways, is fit for the kingdom of God. Remember, as Our Saviour exhorts us, the case of Lot's wife. The angel who brought her and her family out of Sodom, that they might be saved from the fire that was to consume the other inhabitants, had forbidden them to look back on the doomed city; but the woman's curiosity was excited by the noise of the falling flames and the cries of the perishing people; she turned round for a moment, and in that moment she was punished by the almighty God by being turned into a pillar of salt, as a monument to all time, says St. Augustine, to warn all men "not to look back;" so that, when they are once saved from Sodom, that is, from the state of sin, by penance, they must never more seek the place of their former sins even by a wilful desire, if they wish to gain eternal life, which is prefigured by perseverance in good; and this perseverance is also the surest means of rising gloriously and gaining eternal life. This is another proof of my proposition.

Election to heaven depends on the last grace of final perseverance.

No matter how theologians describe predestination, or the eternal selection of the chosen children of God for heaven, it is infallibly true that it is perfected by final perseverance, which is a gift of God enabling a man to continue in the state of sanctifying grace in the last moment of his life, and to die in that state. It is, according to the Council of Trent, "that great gift of perseverance,"¹ without which salvation cannot be hoped for; it is a grace that we must often humbly pray for, but which no man can merit; a grace that the merciful God bestows out of generosity on whom He wills, but which He refuses to no one, unless to those who render themselves unworthy of it during life; a grace of which no one can be sure as long as he lives, because it is given only at the end of life; and if I am so unfortunate as not to receive that grace, everything else that I may have done during my life will not help me to salvation. If I spent a hundred years in the strictest penance, and in all perfection and sanctity, but gave way for a moment to a mortal sin even of thought, and the just God allowed me to die in that sin,

¹ *Magnum illud perseverantiæ donum.*

I should be lost forever. Not he who begins well, nor he who continues well, but he who ends well, will be crowned. Therefore, we cannot promise heaven with certainty to any one, no matter how holy he is, as long as he is on this earth. What is the reason, my dear brethren, that in the beginning of creation God praised all He had made, and called it good, man alone excepted, although He had placed him over all other creatures? He had created the light. "And God saw the light, that it was good,"¹ says the Holy Scripture. He had created the firmament, and divided the waters: "And God saw that it was good," and so on after the creation of the dry land and the animals, "God saw that it was good." Finally the Blessed Trinity, as it were, held a council and resolved to create man: "Let us make man to Our own image and likeness; and God created man to His own image."² Now, since God said of all the creatures that they were good, surely He will praise man as the best of them? But He says not a word of him; not a syllable of approbation. Why so? St. Ambrose answers this question: "His praise is not to be given beforehand, but afterwards. It belongs not to the beginning, but to the end."³ Adam was then holy and a child of God; by sanctifying grace he had a right to Paradise, and was worthy of being beloved by God; but it was not yet time to call him good; and, in fact, in a very short time he became a very wicked sinner. Yet he was not immediately condemned to hell for his sin; he did penance, persevered in the state of grace till death, and is now reigning in the glory of heaven with God. "His praise does not belong to the beginning, but to the end." Sinner, no matter how wicked you have been hitherto, do not despair of salvation; only do real penance, amend your sinful life, and your praise will be at the end. Just, innocent, and now beloved children of God! be not elated on account of the pious lives you have been living hitherto, and of the virtues you have acquired; but keep yourselves continually in humility and child-like fear of God; for even you, as long as you are in this valley of tears, this dangerous exile, may fall and come to an unhappy end; your praise and salvation do not belong to the beginning, but to the end. Paul made a bad beginning, but a good end; Judas began well, but ended badly; therefore Judas

¹ Et vidit Deus lucem quod esset bona.—Gen. 1. 4.

² Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram: et creavit Deus hominem ad imaginem suam.—Ibid. 26. 27.

³ Istius laudatio non præmittitur, sed reservatur. Laudatio ejus non in exordio, sed in fine est.—St. Ambr. Instit. Virg. c. 3.

was condemned to hell, while Paul was elected to eternal glory. Therefore the resurrection to life for every one depends on the last grace of final perseverance.

The best
means of
obtaining
this grace
is constancy
in good.

But, you will exclaim, what are you saying? You pretended that you wished to console us and encourage us to persevere in our good resolutions, and not to relapse into our former sins; and you assured us that, if we did so, we should have a human certainty of rising with Christ to everlasting glory. But now you make the whole thing depend on the last grace of final perseverance. What reason, then, have I to feel consoled, even if I continue faithful in the service of God; since I cannot be sure of the grace of perseverance, on which my salvation depends? That is quite true, my dear brethren; a Roman lady once went to St. Gregory, in a great state of anxiety, and proposed the same difficulty to him, in order to hear what he had to say to it. "Holy Father," said she, "help me in my trouble! How will I fare at the end?" "Ah," answered Gregory, "you ask a difficult and a useless question."¹ It is difficult, because I know as little about it as you do; it is useless, because the knowledge of it would do neither you nor me any good. Still, if you wish me to tell you with full certainty what fate is in store for me and you, you must know that, if we both remain constant in good till the end, we shall surely receive the grace of final perseverance, and die happily." The same answer I make to your objection, Christian souls; my salvation and yours depend on the last grace of final perseverance; there is no doubt about that; but whether we receive that grace or not, depends, in the present arrangements of divine Providence, and according to God's own promise, on ourselves principally, namely, on how we spend the time of our lives. Therefore we should endeavor with all diligence to continue on the right path and not relapse into sin; for this constancy is the true and most certain means of obtaining from God the last grace of final perseverance. "He that shall persevere unto the end," says Our Lord Jesus Christ, "he shall be saved."² These words, as St. John Chrysostom remarks with reason, are not to be understood of the grace of final perseverance; otherwise, their meaning would simply be: he to whom I shall give that final grace shall be saved. No, Our Lord's object was to exhort us all to labor for our salvation, and therefore He urges us to do a thing that is fully in our power if we wish to do it.

¹ Rem difficilem et inutilem postulasti.

² Qui autem perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit.—Matt. x. 22.

Hence, he who perseveres in good during his life, and avoids sin constantly till the end, to him, says Our Lord, I will give the final grace of perseverance, so that he will surely die a happy death. From this it is clear that the most certain means of obtaining that grace is to have a firm resolution of being always faithful to God.

But, you say again, no one, as we have seen already, can merit this grace, even by any amount of previous constancy in good works, so that the uncertainty is just as great as before. True again, my dear brethren; with all our good works we could not merit this grace, according to the full sense of the word merit, so that God would be bound in justice to give it to us, or that we should have a right to claim it from Him as our due; for in the present disposition of God's Providence the whole merit of our good works in the state of grace is exhausted by the increase of sanctifying grace, and the eternal glory which arises from it. However, we can merit this grace by a merit which is founded on the generosity and mercy of God; that is, God, who never allows Himself to be outdone by His creatures in generosity, when He sees a man of good will trying to keep His law, to overcome and mortify his own evil inclinations, to avoid as far as possible all sin and all occasions and dangers of sin, and to be faithful to his good resolutions to the end, so that, although he now and then commits a fault through frailty and weakness, yet he repents of it at once and continues to persevere in good, then the almighty God is, as it were, forced by His infinite goodness and mercy to give to such a man the grace of final perseverance; and it will hardly ever happen that a man of that kind will die an unhappy death.

God will not refuse it to one who continues faithful to Him.

Such was the assured hope of the elder Tobias, in the Old Testament, when, filled with consolation, he said to his friends: "We look for that life which God will give to them that never change their faith from Him."¹ And in the New Law the same assurance was a source of joy to the holy apostle St. Paul, when he said, "There is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just judge, will render to me in that day."² I have not the least doubt of that. How so, great Apostle? Why are you so certain about it? Did God, perhaps, reveal it to you,

Shown from Scripture.

¹ *Vitam illam expectamus, quam Deus daturus est his qui fidem suam numquam mutant ab eo.*—Tob. ii. 18.

² *Reposita est mihi corona justitiæ, quam reddet mihi Dominus in illa die, justus iudex.*—II. Tim. iv. 8.

when you were taken up to the third heaven? When you were there, did you see your crown prepared for you? That can hardly be the case; for afterwards you frequently trembled with fear, lest you should be amongst the reprobate. In what doubtful terms you often spoke of your salvation! And how severely you chastised your body! What was your reason for doing that? "I chastise my body," you say, "and bring it into subjection; lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a cast-away."¹ How often did you not examine your conscience, and, although you could not find the least fault to accuse yourself of, yet you did not dare to promise yourself salvation! "I am not conscious to myself of anything," you said, "yet, am I not hereby justified; but He that judgeth me is the Lord."² But in spite of all that, you now speak without the least doubt or fear of the crown of justice that is in store for you, as if you had a document in your hand to secure you possession of it. On what is this assurance of yours grounded? I am certain of it," he answers, "because I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."³ I persevered after my conversion, and therefore it now remains for me to receive the crown of justice, which the just God will give me. But you are not yet in danger of death. This crown of yours depends on the last grace of final perseverance. And how do you know what will become of you at the end? That is a matter that does not cause me any more anxiety; the merciful and faithful God, to whom I have been true hitherto, will not refuse me this last grace; He will give it to me, and then crown me; "and not only to me, but to them also that love His coming,"⁴ and persevere in His service to the end.

We all expect him who lives well to die well.

We, too, my dear brethren, as experience teaches, give evidence of a similar assurance in our judgments. If we see or hear of a man dying a particularly peaceful, holy, and pious death, our thoughts revert at once to the life he led, and if we find that he lived as a good, pious, and zealous Christian, and was steadfast in keeping the commandments for many years, oh, we think without the least hesitation, what wonder is it that he should die such a happy death! As a man lives, so will he die. As life is,

¹ Castigo corpus meum, et in servitutem redigo; ne forte cum aliis prædicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar.—1. Cor. ix. 27.

² Nihil enim mihi conscius sum, sed non in hoc justificatus sum; qui autem judicat me Dominus est.—Ibid. iv. 4.

³ Bonum certamen certavi, cursum consummavi, fidem servavi.—II. Tim. iv. 7.

⁴ Non solum autem mihi, sed et his, qui diligunt adventum ejus.—Ibid. 8.

so will death be. The man led a pious and holy life, and, of course, his death must be pious and holy, too; he was always faithful and zealous in the service of God, and therefore the divine goodness could not permit him to die otherwise than in the state of grace. On the other hand, if we hear of one (and similar examples are often to be found in books) who led a good, holy, and even miraculous life, but became perverted at the end, and died an unhappy death, and was lost forever, then we shudder with horror, and know not what to think. No, we say at last, that cannot be; God is too good and merciful to allow one of His own beloved children, who has done his best to serve him during life, to be cast away from His fatherly love at the last moment, when the gates of eternity were just opening for him. No, that cannot be the case! For my part, my dear brethren, I do not believe examples of the kind, and I look on them as mere inventions, or, else, if they are really true, then I think, and no doubt you all agree with me, that there must be some secret in the matter that we are not aware of. He whom we look on as having led such a holy life must have been holy in outward appearance, or else, along with his corporal austerities, he gave way to secret pride, or he had the guilt of other hidden sins on his conscience, which we could know nothing of, and which were evident only to the all-seeing eye of God, who, on account of them, deprived that man of the grace of final perseverance, of which he had rendered himself unworthy during life. However that may be, we do not know what to make of such cases; we are horrified at the thought of a man who has served God faithfully during life becoming perverted at the last moment and losing his soul. But this very wonder and horror of ours is a clear and an almost infallible proof of our firm conviction that a good life can be followed only by a happy death, and, therefore, that constancy in good during life is the surest means of obtaining the last grace of final perseverance and what follows thereon, namely, a glorious resurrection and the kingdom of heaven.

Sinners! you who nearly always return to your former sins after confession, see what a sad conclusion you have to draw from this, and what sort of a death you have to expect! Judge yourselves whether you deserve that great grace of final perseverance, which God gives out of pure generosity, and which, as a general rule, He has prepared only for His beloved and faithful children; judge, I say, whether you deserve it, after having

Hence, they who always relapse cannot expect to die a happy death.

spent your lives wandering on the broad way of vice! We are not surprised that a good Christian should die a happy death; and I would feel just as little surprise if I saw one of you going into eternity in a despairing and unrepentant state; I should look on it as a miracle of the divine mercy, if, after such a vicious life and such constant changing from sin to confession, and confession to sin, you died a happy death.

Shown by
an example.

In the annals of the old Fathers we read an account of a young Religious, who, although he was not addicted to any great vice, was tepid and slothful in the divine service. He fell into a dangerous illness, and while expecting death, gave every sign of great trouble and anxiety. A pious abbot, Mutius by name, who was well versed in spiritual matters, assisted him at his death-bed, and encouraged him as well as he could. "Have confidence, my dear brother," he said to him; "let hope console you!" "And on what shall I found my hope?" asked the dying man. "On the infinite mercy of God, who is now calling you to your reward for having served Him," was the answer of the abbot. "The mercy of God!" replied the sick man; "it is that very mercy that almost drives me to despair, because I have so often misused it during life." "How did you misuse it?" asked the abbot. "Did you not leave the world in order to serve God in religion?" "Ah!" sighed the other, "would that I had served Him well! But my service was a very wretched one!" "What? Put away at once those cowardly thoughts! they are only an inspiration of the devil, who wishes to drive you to despair. I have often seen you going to confession and holy Communion according to the rule of your Order, and, judging from your outward actions, I can only conclude that you are in the grace of God." "Alas! confession and Communion!" exclaimed the dying man. "I cannot trust one of my confessions, for I never found any trace of amendment of my vicious life after them. I lived as I did when I was in the world, and continued to live so during my whole time in religion. Of all my confessions, God knows that there is perhaps hardly one that was really valid, since I fell back into the same sins always. Alas! woe to me! how will it be with me when I appear before the judgment-seat of God! I dare not despair, but neither can I promise myself eternal salvation. Dear Father, pray that my life may be spared, that I may have time to do penance! The holy man prayed as desired, and his prayers were heard, so that the young Religious obtained a respite of three years, during

which time he did penance for his sins with most extraordinary fervor.

My reflections on this incident, my dear brethren, are as follows: a Religious who did not live according to the vain and dangerous ways of the world; who was not exposed to the dangerous occasions of sin by carnal lust or improper intimacy; who was not given to unjust practices, and was freed from the risk of committing many other grievous sins; who had so many excellent means at hand in religion to attain the perfection of his state, and who so often received the holy sacraments; he at the hour of death must almost despair of a glorious resurrection, because he found no improvement in his mode of life after his confessions, although he had probably only venial sins to accuse himself of; and he was obliged to beg a respite of three years from God, in order to do true penance. Then, alas! I must think, how will it be with so many Christians, who daily and with the utmost recklessness commit mortal sins, bringing the same sins to confession every Easter, or whenever they go, and not making any effort to leave the proximate occasion of sin, to restore ill-gotten goods, to lay aside their hatred of their neighbor, or to give up the improper intimacy in which they are living? Oh, I repeat, truly a miracle of the divine mercy must be wrought, in order to enable such Christians to console themselves on their death-beds with the hope of receiving the grace of final perseverance and rising gloriously with Christ to eternal happiness!

Especially when they remain in the habit of sin.

I conclude, my dear brethren, with the beautiful exhortation given by St. Jerome to a certain layman, who had renounced the vanities of the world, and had gone to Bethlehem to live there in solitude, in order to devote his whole time unhindered to the service of God and the salvation of his soul; an exhortation that I wish were deeply engraved on the hearts of you all, so that you would never lose sight of it. "I beseech thee, brother, and advise thee with a father's affection, not to turn back to look at the Sodom you have adandoned."¹ Sinner! you who now have left the city of sin by your Easter Confession, if it was a good one, and are now re-admitted among the number of the children of God, I beg and implore of you, by the love you owe yourself and your immortal soul, ah! do not look back again! You have laid aside the garment of sin; do not put it on again. You are now in a good state, and if you wish to be sure of salvation, keep on

Conclusion and exhortation to persevere in good after doing penance.

¹ Obsecro te, frater, et moneo parentis affectu, ut qui Sodomam reliquisti, post tergum ne respicias.

the way that leads to heaven, and do not go back to the broad road of hell, to the great danger of your soul. If it were revealed by God that every one who dies in this town of Treves will be saved, is there any one of us who would venture to leave it? Suppose that, under such circumstances, one of the members of the clergy of this town were called to Rome by the Pope to receive the cardinal's hat; would he go, do you think? Eh? If he loved his soul and its salvation he would, in my opinion, say to himself: I can go to heaven without the cardinal's hat; I prefer remaining here as a simple priest, with the assurance of my salvation, to going to Rome and perhaps losing my soul. And even if the plague broke out in our midst, so that it became extremely risky to life to remain here, do you think any one would run away out of the town? I should think not; for my part, at least, I should not on any account go away, knowing that such a good chance of salvation is secured to me by remaining. But, my dear brethren, we have the infallible assurance from God Himself that all those who persevere in His service till the end will be saved, and all who do not will be lost; let us, then, remain in that city of safety, and never leave the good state in which we are, no matter what happens.

And not to
be led astray
by any diffi-
culties.

And let no one be disheartened by imaginary difficulties; for the very difficulties we meet with in the divine service should incite us to all the greater fervor in our determination to persevere in it. Have you ever remarked how a boatman acts on the Moselle, when going against the current? If he comes to a place where the water eddies and whirls round with the force of the tide, and hinders the boat in her progress, he puts out all the more strength and works all the harder with the oars, in order to overcome the resistance of the water; nor does he cease his efforts until he is past the difficulty. So must we act in the stormy sea of the world; when difficulties and dangers are the greatest, then must we be more diligent and earnest, trusting in the help of God to come through successfully; and if we fall now and then through weakness and frailty, we must not lose heart, or cease persevering. The boatman is sometimes, in spite of his efforts, driven back by the opposing current; still, he does not lose courage, but labors all the more diligently, until he has made up for lost time. If a merchant were to give up business when he experiences a slight loss, he would never be a rich man. If a peasant ceased tilling his land when an unfruitful season comes and renders his labor vain, when would the land be tilled?

Now, these people do not allow slight difficulties to deter them from their usual labor and toil; much less, then, should the servant of God be frightened by difficulties, since he has an infinitely greater gain and reward to hope for, if he labors assiduously.

As I told you on another occasion, my dear brethren, by way of New-year's greeting, each one of you should not look in half-dazed fashion at the number of years he has still to live on earth, as if it were almost an impossibility to abstain from forbidden pleasures for all that time; but he should fix his eyes on the present time, as if this were to be his last day on earth (and as a matter of fact, this very hour could be the last for each one of us), and let him say to himself: can I not keep the good resolutions I made in confession for this day, at all events? Who knows whether the Lord will not knock at my door this evening and call me into eternity? And woe to me if this day should find me untrue to my resolutions and perverted, so as to barter my eternal salvation! what would it help me in that case that I have so often overcome myself, and resisted my evil inclinations, if I cease persevering now, and consent to a mortal sin, when perhaps my last moment is at hand? Let each one remember the firm purpose he made in confession, and say to himself daily: how? my soul! thou has acknowledged the injustice of thy conduct; thou hast repented of thy wickedness and promised eternal fidelity to thy God; is not that acknowledgment, are not the motives you had then, as valid to-day as they were then? Why shouldst thou, then, go back on thy word, and break thy resolution? No, I will act like the patient Job, in joy and sorrow, in prosperity and adversity, in consolation and temptation: "My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake."¹ The fidelity I have once sworn to God, when He bestowed on me the great grace of forgiveness of my sins, I will observe inviolably; the document I now hold in my hand, and can, if I will, continue to hold, I will never throw away by falling into sin. "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved." I wish to be saved, and therefore I will persevere to the end in the service of God, and I shall certainly fulfil my wish. Such should be your resolve. Amen.

But daily to
renew the
firm pur-
pose.

¹ *Justificationem meam, quam cepi tenere, non deseram.*—Job. xxvii. 6.

FIFTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON FREQUENT CONFESSION, AS A MEANS OF PERSEVERING IN GOOD.

Subject.

The best means of avoiding sin and persevering in good is frequent and contrite confession.—*Preached on the twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost, on which day falls the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin.*

Text.

Beati qui audiunt verbum Dei, et custodiunt illud.—Luke ii. 28.

“Blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it.”

Introduction.

To hear willingly and constantly the word of God in sermons is a good thing, necessary for many, and useful to all, and, as I shall show on another occasion, it is one of the surest signs of predestination to the kingdom of heaven. Yet, to be satisfied with merely hearing the word of God, and not to endeavor to practise the truths taught in it, only makes one more responsible to the divine justice. Hitherto, my dear brethren, I have explained in sufficient detail a subject that is of the greatest importance, and that all must have a clear knowledge of, namely, the holy sacrament of penance; and I have shown that which is required to receive it, how and in what manner the penitent must examine his conscience, repent of his sins, confess them, satisfy for them, and steadfastly amend his life. I trust that the good God has effected by the light of His grace, that some, at least, of those who have heard what I had to say about this subject will have profited by it. To the almighty God alone be the honor, glory, and thanksgiving, if such is the case! I hope, too, that they who have heard me will not forget what they have learned, but always derive more and more fruit from it. “Blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it,” in order to act on it and arrange their lives according to it. There is still one point to be considered by those who, after diligent preparation, have laid aside their sins in confession; and that is, how they are to avoid a relapse in future, so as to continue in the grace of

God. It is not my intention now to repeat the motives which should put us on our guard against a relapse, and make us persevere in good; only one means will I suggest which can best help us to this end. And that is confession, frequent confession with due preparation, as I shall now show, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

The best means of avoiding sin and persevering in good is frequent and contrite confession. Therefore he who loves his soul and its salvation will often have recourse to the sacrament of penance. Such is the whole subject of this exhortation.

That it may not be fruitless, give us Thy grace, O generous God! We beg it of Thee through the merits of that Immaculate Virgin, who from her earliest years gave herself up altogether to Thy service, and persevered in it to the end, without the least stain of sin. Help us, you, too, holy guardian angels!

If you wish to keep your room always free from dust, you must have it swept out frequently during the week. It is easy to see whether the servant is lazy, or the master or mistress careless in this respect; for, if the room which one occupies daily is allowed to go for even a fortnight, not to say a month, without being swept out, is it any wonder if it should be found in a filthy condition at the end of that time? Those who go in and out leave some dust behind them on the floor; cobwebs hang here and there on the walls, and the furniture is covered with a thick layer of dust. Therefore they who love cleanliness have their rooms swept every day, nay, sometimes often during the day. The same care must be observed with regard to one's hair; if it is not frequently combed, it will get quite disordered and dirty, as we see to be the case with those who are careless in the use of the comb.

A room that is seldom swept out must be full of dust.

It is the same with a man's conscience. We poor mortals are naturally so frail and inclined to evil, that we cannot long keep ourselves free from faults and sins, surrounded as we are by temptations and occasions of sin. No matter how careful we are, before we have time to look round, as the saying is, we go wrong, either by a thought in the imagination, or by a word that escapes us, or even in action. Even the just man falls seven times a day; how often, then, does he fall in the week? and how often in a month? And how will it be with one who consents to a mortal sin? for while he is in that unhappy state he cannot,

So, too, he who seldom goes to confession must have a bad conscience.

humanly speaking, long refrain from other sins, on account of the loss of sanctifying grace and the want of other special helps from God. Now, if one who is in that condition goes to confession. I will not say once or twice a year, as, alas! is the case with so many, but once a month, or every two months (and if I said weeks, it would still be too long to wait), what a number of sins he will have committed! His conscience must necessarily be full of filth. He will find that he has fared like the field of the lazy husbandman, who leaves it unploughed for a long time, and like the vineyard of the foolish man, who allows it to go to ruin. "I passed by the field of the slothful man," says the wise Solomon, "and by the vineyard of the foolish man: and behold, it was all filled with nettles, and thorns had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall was broken down."¹ And what else is the reason why many, after they have made their confession with heartfelt sorrow and with an earnest purpose of amendment, so soon relapse into their old sins, if not because they seldom go to confession? Well did Paul of Granada understand this, when, considering those words of Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Luke, "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through places without water, seeking rest; and not finding, he saith: I will return into my house whence I came out;"² and when he finds the house well swept and garnished, he takes with him other seven spirits, worse than himself; "and entering in, they dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."³ Can the evil spirit, then, enter a soul that has been cleansed and purified in the sacrament of penance? Certainly, answers Paul of Granada, and that, too, because it has been cleansed but once; for if one is satisfied with that, and does not frequently purify his conscience, it will not be long before it will again be sullied, and the evil spirit, having once been enabled to enter it, will take up his abode there, and dwell in it as in his own house. Hence the conscience must often be cleansed, if it is to be kept free from stain for a long time.

While he
who con-
fesses well
and fre-

On the other hand, it would be an almost prodigious thing for one who goes to confession with due preparation frequently during the month, to lead a bad life. For, on the one hand, the oft-

¹ Per agrum hominis pigri transivi, et per vineam viri stulti: et ecce totum repleverant urticae, et operuerant superficiem ejus spinæ, et maceria lapidum destructa erat.—Prov. xxiv. 30, 31.

² Cum immundus spiritus exierit de homine, ambulat per loca inaquosa, quærens requiem, et non inveniens, dicit: revertar in domum meam, unde exivi.—Luke xi. 24.

³ Et ingressi habitant ibi. Et sunt novissima hominis illius pejora prioribus.—Ibid. 26.

repeated, diligent examen of conscience; the frequent acts of sorrow and detestation of the sins that one commits; the firm purpose, so often repeated, never to sin again; and, on the other hand, the frequent reception and increase of sanctifying grace, and of the special helping graces of God that strengthen the soul in the sacrament of penance against the temptations and dangers of sin, make it, humanly speaking, a half impossibility for a man to be addicted at all events to grievous sin.

And even if such a man does fall through weakness and frailty in a violent temptation, or in some particularly alluring occasion, his sin cannot find a resting-place long in his soul; for his next confession will banish it. It is true that his conscience has been sullied; but the soul is there at once with the broom to sweep out the filth. He has, indeed, fallen grievously; but he soon rises again by a good confession, and stands firm on his feet. It is with him as with the workman, who gets a thorn or a splinter into his finger while at work; he at once lays aside what he is doing, and does not rest until he has forced out the thorn or splinter, so as to leave it no time to make the wound worse and cause it to fester. "When he shall fall," says the Prophet David of the just and pious, "he shall not be bruised; for the Lord putteth His hand under him."¹ What? He shall not be bruised? Does not mortal sin inflict a severe injury on the soul? Yes; but, as Origen says, speaking of this text, there is a great difference between a pious and just man who sins, but goes frequently to confession, and a careless, wicked sinner, who seldom receives the sacraments. The latter falls, and does himself woful injury by his fall, because he lies there for a long time, like one who is grievously wounded, and whose wounds being neglected, begin to fester and to eat into the flesh, so that it is very difficult to cure them. The former falls, indeed, but he does not hurt himself so badly, for he rises at once, and by speedy penance heals his wound immediately. He acts like the brave soldier who, when fighting with his adversary, slips and falls to the earth, but springs up again in all haste, and, filled with new courage, overthrows his opponent.

Strange are the words that St. Paul makes use of when speaking of the sin of Adam. "By one man," he says, "sin entered into this world, and by sin death, and so death passed upon all men."² There is a hidden meaning in those words, my dear

quently
cannot be
addicted to
mortal sins.

For, even if
he falls now
and then,
he rises
again at
once.

So that sin
has no firm
footing in
him.

¹ Cum ceciderit, non collidetur; quia Dominus supponit manum suam.—Ps. xxxvi. 24.

² Sicut per unum hominem peccatum in hunc mundum intravit, et per peccatum mors, et ita in omnes homines mors pertransiit.—Rom. v. 12.

brethren; speaking of the world, he says that death and sin entered into it. But speaking of men, he says that death passed upon them all. Why so? Does not the world mean the men who are in it? Have not all men, with the exception of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, really sinned in Adam? Why, then, does the Apostle make a distinction between the world and men? Origen gives us a beautiful explanation of this difficulty. By the world, he says, the Apostle understands the vain children of the world, who live according to the world and its perverse maxims and usages; but by men he understands those souls who immediately after a fall enter into themselves, and endeavor in the main to lead pious lives. "Into those, then, who are called the world, that is, worldly people," tepid, inconstant men, "sin enters," when they commit it, "for they remain a long time in the state of sin;" but in the case of the others, who do not live according to the world, and try to lead pious lives, "sin merely passes upon them, when they commit it, that is, they are, indeed, in the state of sin, but they free themselves from it at once by doing penance immediately." Sin in the just and pious is like a traveller in an inn, in which he rests but for a short time; but in the wicked it is like one who has taken up his permanent dwelling in a house. In the former case sin merely passes by; but in the latter it remains constantly.

Nor does he
lose the
name of a
just man.

Therefore the latter are properly called sinners; a hateful name, that they who often go to confession do not even deserve, although they sometimes fall through weakness and frailty. "He who rises at once by penance," says St. Jerome, "does not lose the name of a just man." If a man loses some money at play, but wins it back again, he cannot be called a loser. A general who flies with his troops from the field of battle, but soon collects the fugitives, rushes at the foe with renewed courage, and puts them completely to flight, cannot be said to have lost the battle, for he has rather gained it, like a valiant general, and has conquered the enemy. "He who rises at once by penance, does not lose the name of a just man." Nor is he overcome by the arch-enemy, nor does he lose his right to be called a just man, who now and then succumbs to a violent temptation, and consents to sin, but rises at once after his fall, by penance.

The devil
does not
dare to
tempt him.

Let, then, the crafty demon come on with secret attacks and suggestions, with which he is constantly trying to lead souls astray; and what great harm can he do one who goes to con-

¹ Justi vocabulum non amittit, qui per poenitentiam resurgit.—S. Hieron. Ep. 46.

fession often in the month? Truly, in the soul of such a person he does not find a dwelling in which he can hope to remain for a long time. In the houses of the rich you will not often see cobwebs on the walls or the windows; for the spider knows that its work would be in vain, and that it would be always in danger of seeing its web destroyed by the maid's broom. Swallows do not easily return to a house in which their nests have been disturbed a few times. In the same way the devil has no hopes of gaining a firm footing, of building his nest and spinning his poisonous webs, in the soul from which he is at once driven out when he enters it; for he knows well that his plans will be foiled, and that he will be expelled, to his own great confusion, from the dwelling he had begun to occupy. One of those accursed spirits, who had taken possession of a person, was once conjured and forced in the name of God to say what caused him the greatest damage. There is nothing, he answered, that we demons hate more in Catholic Christians, nothing that frustrates more fully our efforts, than frequent and contrite confession, and the habit of receiving the sacraments often.

Truly, if the father of lies, who is otherwise not at all to be believed, ever told the truth, he did so on that occasion. "Every one that doth evil, hateth the light;"¹ he who intends committing a crime shuns and flies the light, that his wickedness may not be known. A traitor in a fortress is always uneasy and suspicious; he is continually in dread that his treachery will be found out; if he has the least cause to fear that there is any suspicion about him, he thinks at once: this is no place for me, and he betakes himself to flight without delay. A dissolute man, who is seeking to lead an innocent person astray with his flattery and caresses, cannot bear to have her say a word to her parents of the attempt she is making on her virtue; whereas, if she keeps silent, and says nothing to her parents, although her will is opposed to anything evil, yet the other does not allow himself to be put off by the first or second refusal; he perseveres, and still hopes to gain his end some time or other. But if he sees that the modest, chaste young girl at once runs to her father, and complains of the treatment she has been subjected to, then the tempter is completely foiled, and desists from his attacks, knowing that they will certainly be fruitless. The devil is a traitor and wicked wretch of this kind, when he

so quickly
again.

Shown by
similes.

¹ Omnis qui male agit, odit lucem.—John iii. 20.

tempts and tries to allure a man to commit sin. His object is to take the fortress out of the hands of God, and to cast it into the jaws of hell; he spares no trouble to turn away from her heavenly Bridegroom the soul that is in the state of grace and a beloved spouse of the Holy Ghost, and to this end he represents to her imagination pictures of unlawful pleasure, or of temporal gain, to persuade her to commit that act of spiritual adultery. Now, if he sees a man going often to confession, and disclosing to his spiritual Father with sorrow of heart the sin he has committed and the temptations that assail him, oh, then the tempter knows that his efforts are sure to be frustrated, and, despairing of success, he is forced to beat a retreat.

Frequent
confession
lessens the
punishment
due to sin.

And besides that, not only does frequent confession cleanse the soul from the stain of sin and hinder the attacks of the devil; but it also destroys gradually and securely the vestiges and evil effects of former sins, namely, the punishment still due to them, which should otherwise be suffered in the terrible fire of purgatory to the last farthing. "A modest confession," says St. Ambrose, "is of the greatest help in wiping out the punishment due to our sins."¹ It is of the greatest help; for, although every penitential work and pious practice that one performs in the state of grace is partly available in the way of satisfaction for our sins, yet this satisfying power is specially attached by Our Lord to the sacrament of penance; for, in it, besides the acts that are made of the most perfect virtues, faith, hope, charity, and sorrow for sin, which constitute the preparation for it, the penance imposed by the priest, small though it be, is, not on account of the work or prayer in which it consists, but through the virtues of the sacrament, united with the infinite merits of Jesus Christ and offered to our heavenly Father to pay the debt contracted by our sins. Hence one "Our Father," imposed by way of penance by the priest in confession, has far more efficacy in atoning for sin and blotting out the punishment due to it, than a whole rosary said merely out of private devotion. Therefore many pious souls are accustomed to ask their confessors to give them a severe penance for small faults, in order all the better to atone for their sins. "The oftener one confesses his sins," says St. Thomas, "the more does he lessen the punishment due to them," so that at last, after repeated confessions, it is taken away altogether."² "Nor it it too

¹ Plurimum suffragatur verecunda confessio ad pœnam quam extinguimus.

² Quanto aliquis pluries de ipsis peccatis confitetur, tanto magis pœna minuitur.

much to say," he adds, "that frequent confession takes away even all that punishment ;" ¹ so that a man owes nothing more to divine justice, since the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, in which he so often participates in the sacrament of penance, completely satisfy for his sins.

Further, what is of the greatest advantage and profit for the soul, it follows that one who goes often to confession, even if he sometimes falls grievously through weakness, yet passes the greater part of his life in the grace and friendship of God ; and whenever he confesses his sins with sorrow of heart, that grace is not only increased by the power of the sacrament, but, as a consequence of that increase, all the good works performed in the state of grace become more and more meritorious ; until at last an incalculable amount of treasures of merit must be heaped up by such a soul during life. On the other hand, a tepid Christian, who goes to confession but once or twice a year, and defers repentance for a long time after committing mortal sin, labors like the dumb beast, and, with all the good works he may perform in the meantime, gains nothing for heaven. All his fasting, almsgiving, devout visits to the church, hearing Masses, saying the rosary, saluting pious pictures, and other good works, are, indeed, as I have elsewhere explained, not utterly useless as long as he is in the state of sin, for they help him to keep many commandments of God, to foster good habits, and to obtain the mercy of God ; yet, after he has done all this, he has not gained the least degree of glory in heaven ; he is and remains a slave of the devil, who allows him to do those good works, as long as he avoids the confessional, which would free him from his slavery. Thus he lives at enmity with God, and is always on the verge of eternal ruin ; and if he is hurried off by an unprovided death, he will be condemned to hell forever. Truly, he is in an unhappy state !

Increases
sanctifying
grace.

Finally, what else can follow from the frequent confessions and pious life of a man who is really anxious to save his soul, but perseverance in good, and a happy death ? As a man lives, so will he die. This is a saying that is generally verified. He who spends the most of his time on land, and seldom ventures on the water, can have a well-grounded hope that he will die on land ; while the sailor, who is always on the stormy sea, and although he sometimes sets foot on shore, yet never remains on it long, but returns to his ship to carry on his restless avocation,

Obtains the
grace of
persever-
ance and a
happy
death.

¹ Non est inconveniens si per frequentem confessionem etiam tota poena tollitur.

seems to have made up his mind that he will die at sea. Such, too, is the end that those children of the world have to expect who spend their lives in going from sin to sin, and go to confession once or twice a year (and God knows what sort of a confession they make)! They spend the most of their time on the stormy sea; what sort of a death have they to expect? "Their soul shall die in a storm," we might say of them with that friend of Job. They have put off for a long time the settlement of their accounts with God, and have allowed them to fall into disorder; and in disorder they will find them at the last moment of their lives, when they will hardly have time to examine and arrange them. Happy Christians, who often go to confession with due preparation, and live, as it were, on dry land. safe in the sweet peace of your conscience! You are they of whom Christ, our dear Saviour, says, in the Gospel of St. Luke: "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching: Amen I say to you that He will gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and passing, will minister unto them."¹ You are watching now, since you are continually occupied with the purification of your souls, that very business which will hardly demand any of your attention at the hour of death, since you will have rightly performed it beforehand; and when death comes, your Lord will meet you and invite you to His banquet. You are those of whom St. Paul says to the Corinthians: "But if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."²

Exhortation
to frequent
and contrite
confession.

Happy, then, I say again, are you who keep yourselves away from many sins by frequent confession, and persevere zealously in the service of God! Be of good heart, and never let anything interfere with that holy and most advantageous habit of yours! Ah, would to God that all those careless, tepid Christians, who burrow in the earth like blind moles, and are occupied the whole day with earthly things, would only follow your example; they would not then rot away in their sins as they are now doing! Almighty God, who holdest the hearts of men in Thy hands, and canst lead them according to Thy pleasure where Thou wilt, "Let peoples confess to Thee, O God; let all peoples give praise to Thee."³ Twice, my dear brethren, in a short psalm,

¹ *Moriatur in tempestate anima eorum*—Tob. xxxvi. 14.

² *Beati servi illi quos, cum venerit Dominus, invenerit vigilantes: Amen dico vobis, quod præcignet se, et faciet illos discumbere, et transiens ministrabit illis*—Luke xii. 37.

³ *Quodsi nosmetipsos judicavimus, non utique judicemur*.—I. Cor. xi. 31.

⁴ *Confiteantur tibi populi, Deus; confiteantur tibi populi omnes*.—Ps. lxxvi. 4.

the Prophet repeats the same words. Why? He wishes to encourage all men, says Hugo, to frequent and contrite confession of their sins. And truly, as the Roman Catechism says, "there is nothing the faithful should deem of greater importance, than to cleanse their souls by frequently confessing their sins." We know by unhappy experience that we sully our souls by daily and almost hourly faults and failings; why, then, should we not cleanse them by the frequent use of such an easy means as the holy sacrament of penance, unless we wish to be buried in the filth of our sins? What care and trouble do not fastidious worldlings, and especially delicate ladies, take to keep themselves clean outwardly, so as to please the eyes of some mere mortal? Why should we not take the same care to keep our immortal souls free from the filth of sin, so as to please Our God, who is worthy of infinite love? We all wash face and hands every day. And if they are dirtied ten times a day, ten times a day we wash them again. Are our immortal souls of less importance to us, so that, when they are sullied, we need not care to cleanse them? "Let peoples confess to Thee, O God; let all peoples give praise to Thee!" Ah, Christians, go often to confession, and make frequent use of that salutary means, if you are really desirous to remain free from sin in the future, and to persevere in good. Think of the end for which we are in this world; it is no other than to serve our great God alone, to tend to the business of our souls, and to live in constant penance, that we may rejoice forever in heaven after death.

Go often to confession! many will say. Must I, then, often submit to that fearful torture? Is it not torment enough for me to be compelled by the commandment of the Church to go once a year? I find it so hard to go every three months, that I tremble all over when I think of it; what would it be if I had all that trouble and anxiety to endure several times in the month? I quite believe that what you say is true; but your objection is as ridiculous as the complaint of the jester, who, having lain on a single straw all night, said the next morning that he was suffering from severe pains in the back: and he added, if it hurts me so to sleep on one straw, what would it be if I slept on a whole heap? It is no wonder that the confession of your sins appears difficult to you; but do you know why it is so? Because you go so seldom to confession. You make your confession, so to speak,

The more frequent it is, the easier it becomes.

¹ Nulla res fidelibus adeo curae esse debet, quam ut frequenti peccatorum confessione animam studeant explere.

according to the almanac; certain feast-days are marked therein with red letters; for instance, the 15th of August, the feast of the Assumption; the 1st of November, the feast of All Saints; certain days in March or April; Easter time, etc.; but these feasts are celebrated only on the days marked down for them in red letters in the calendar. So also you, and probably many other sinners, too, write down in the calendar of your confessions: on Easter Sunday, a confession; on the feast of the Assumption, a confession. And that must do for the year. No matter what sins you commit meantime, you never dream of going to confession unless at the fixed times. What wonder is it, then, I ask, that confession seems so hard to you? Everything that one is unaccustomed to, and does not practise assiduously, appears difficult. A dirty little boy, who has to herd swine all the year, and never combs his hair, if he is at last compelled to use the comb, has to tug and pull and drag many a hair out before he succeeds; whereas a well-reared boy, who combs his hair every day, as he ought, finds not the least difficulty in doing so. A soldier who seldom draws his sword, and allows it to rust in the scabbard, has to work hard at it before he succeeds in drawing it when the time comes for him to use it. If you go but once or twice a year to confession, you must necessarily find it a difficult and troublesome task; for everything that is required for this holy sacrament becomes harder to fulfil when it is long deferred. The examen of conscience becomes harder, for you have to recall the sins you have committed during a long interval, so as to declare them in due order, mentioning their number and nature. Contrition becomes more difficult, as well as the firm purpose of amendment, on account of the influence of bad habits, that have grown almost to a second nature and cannot at once be got rid of and detested. The disclosure of one's sins in confession becomes more difficult, on account of the long time it requires to declare a great number of sins with their specific distinctions. And all this difficulty has to be faced by him who wishes to make a good confession. Bromiard wonders at those who, although they have not been to confession for a year, yet rush into the church, and, without having patience to wait, go to the first priest they find and ask him to hear their confession, saying that they will not keep him long, nor give him much trouble; how can such people make a good confession?¹ And even if one finds no dif-

¹ Est mirabile qui per totum annum non fuit confessus, festinanter venit, dicens : audias me, statim ero expeditus.

difficulty on account of the time it takes to tell his sins, he must, at all events, feel very much ashamed at having to declare so many grievous transgressions. Now, all these difficulties disappear when you go frequently to confession. If a man confesses his sins every week, or at least every fortnight, what great difficulty can he find in it, in God's name, unless, indeed, he makes difficulties for himself through unfounded anxiety. Otherwise everything is easy enough for him. The examen of conscience is easy, because he has only a short time to go through; contrition is easy, because he is well practised in making acts of sorrow for sin; it is easy for him to tell his sins, because he has, generally speaking, nothing to confess but small faults and daily imperfections, or else he has to repeat some sin of his past life. You see now that the very excuse you allege goes against you; so that, if you wish to remove the difficulty of which you complain, and to make it easy and consoling for you to confess your sins, you must go to confession frequently; there is no better means to that end.

But what is the use of going so often? What will I have to confess? I could not find anything to accuse myself of so often, so that I should be obliged always to repeat the same thing, and that is not worth while. What? You could not find anything to confess? Alas! you will find enough matter for sorrow and confession, if you only examine your conscience as you ought! That objection of yours shows that you are not very watchful over your actions, or else that you think little of venial sins, since your conscience is capable of feeling only mortal sins, and is like a worn-out horse, that cannot feel a blow, and is insensible to anything but the spur. Still, if you cannot remember having committed any deliberate venial sin during the week, give thanks to the good God. I congratulate you with all my heart, and wish I could say as much for myself! But, nevertheless, can you not go to confession and receive the holy sacraments? You need have no trouble on that head, nor are you obliged to sin on purpose to have something to tell the priest, like those boys who, when they are sent to confession on the four great feasts of the year, fight and quarrel with each other on the way, and when asked what they are fighting about, reply: we are committing sin, so as to have something to tell in confession. No, I say, that is altogether unnecessary. If during your whole life you had done nothing worse than telling one deliberate venial lie (I am pretty certain that you will find something more than

He who has committed but one sin in his life has still matter enough for confession.

that on your conscience), that is matter enough and more than enough for sorrow and repentance and for a firm purpose of amendment every day of your life; and therefore, if you wish, you can receive the sacrament of penance validly every day. Is it not worth while now? For thus you receive every day an increase of sanctifying grace, by which all your future good works are made more pleasing to God and more meritorious of eternal glory in heaven. Is not that worth while? You receive, too, each time, fresh special graces from God, to enable you the more easily to overcome temptations and dangers of sin, and to abstain from evil? Is not that worth while? Each time you get a new impulse to persevere in good and to preserve the friendship of God to the end. Is not that worth while? Each time you blot out a good share of the punishment due to your sins. Is not that worth while?

Pious Christians go to confession often during the week.

O pious and holy souls, you have better understood the great worth of the sacramental grace! St. Charles Borromeo, our holy Founder, St. Ignatius, St. Catherine of Siena, the blessed Coleta, and many others used to go to confession every day. St. Francis Borgia went twice a day, in the morning before Mass, and in the evening before going to rest. Catharine of Sweden, a royal princess, and Father Gonzalez Sylveira, a martyr, used to go to confession three times every day. Do you imagine that those holy servants of God had a new mortal sin to confess, every time they went to the sacred tribunal? Nay, do you think they had even a venial sin to tell? Who could reasonably entertain such a thought? Oh, no! their object was to purify their souls all the more, and to obtain an increase of sanctifying grace and merit at the same time. And could you not do the same once a fortnight, or, if you are very busy, which is not, however, a valid excuse, at least once a month? Shall I tell you the real reason why you do not begin to go frequently to confession? It is because you have not a sincere desire to lead a pious life, to please God, to enrich your soul with merits; your idea is to live according to the vain world, and not to mortify your sensuality and evil inclinations, nor to amend your vicious ways; that is the whole reason.

Conclusion and resolution.

Oh, certainly! That it is which has kept me so long from frequent confession! Ah, my Lord and my God! if I had during my life made better use of that easy, salutary, and advantageous means, I should not have committed so many grievous sins; I should not have remained so long addicted to this or that vice;

I should have collected, oh, what a great treasure of merits, as so many seeds of future glory in heaven! But now, alas, by being in the state of sin, I have deprived myself of them forever! Now I will earnestly begin, and will continue during my life to go to confession at least every fortnight, or at the furthest every month, so that by thus constantly cleansing my conscience I may be preserved from sin, be more zealous in Thy service, increase daily in virtue and sanctifying grace, and persevere constantly therein till death.

FIFTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON GUARDING THE HEART FROM EVIL THOUGHTS.

Subject.

1. Are evil thoughts sins? 2. When are they sins, and how is one to guard his heart from them?—*Preached on the third Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Gaudebit cor vestrum, et gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis.
—John xvi. 22.

“Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you.”

Introduction.

Sorrowful was the announcement made by such a beloved Master to His forlorn disciples: “You shall not see Me!” and that, too, in a short time; “A little while” I shall remain with you, then I shall leave you, and, “you shall not see Me.” Still, there was some consolation in store for them: “A little while and you shall see Me;” and then your sorrow shall be changed into joy; “your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you.” Far more sorrowful, my dear brethren, and without any gleam of consolation, is the state of those sinners of whom one can say, after they have been to confession, “a little while;” for but a short time they will have the Lord in their hearts by grace, and rejoice with Him; and again in a little while, by relapsing into sin, they will drive God out of their hearts, and lose His grace and friendship. I have shown

recently that perseverance in good is the surest sign of a future resurrection with Christ to glory, and of seeing Him in heaven, from which I concluded that inconstancy in good and the habit of relapsing into sin is an almost unfailing sign of being rejected by God. To avoid this relapse, and to encourage us to be constant in the divine service, I will now suggest for your advantage, and mine too, some useful means, and, first, we shall turn our attention to that part of the human body which is the noblest, namely the heart, from which everything good and bad takes its first beginning, mindful of the exhortation of the Holy Ghost by the Wise Man, in the Book of Proverbs: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it."¹ Therefore, O man, carefully guard your heart from all evil thoughts and desires, if you wish to continue in the grace of God and to rejoice with Him in heaven. There are two questions which I propose answering in this instruction.

Plan of Discourse.

Are evil thoughts sins? This I shall answer in the first part. When are evil thoughts sins? This I shall answer in the second part. How am I to guard my heart against them? This I shall show in the conclusion.

O Holy Ghost! enlighten our hearts, that we may henceforth keep them from being sullied, so that they may be Thy constant dwelling! This we beg of Thee through the merits of Thy Immaculate Spouse Mary and our holy guardian angels, that we may all be amongst the number of those to whom Thou hast said the consoling words, "Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you."

Many think that sin cannot be committed in thought.

It is a great mistake of many, very many people, to imagine that, as long as they do nothing wrong in outward act, they need not trouble about their thoughts and desires, no matter of what kind they may be. For instance, a man is grossly insulted; he goes about full of bitterness and enmity; he thinks of all possible ways and means of taking revenge on the person who has insulted him, and of repaying him like for like; but through want of opportunity, or because his anger has evaporated after a considerable time, or even on account of some supernatural motive, because he recalls vividly to his recollection the law of Jesus Christ, which forbids all grievous revenge under pain of damnation, and commands us to love even our worst enemies and to

¹ *Omni custodia serva cor tuum, quia ex ipso vita procedit.*—Prov. iv. 23.

return them good for evil, he refrains from fulfilling in act the revenge he was plotting. Another, who is sitting idly at home, or is lying sleepless in bed in the morning, has his imagination full of all sorts of abominable images; it represents to him all kinds of temptations in the matter of impurity, so that he thinks what he would do if he came into such an occasion, etc. He takes pleasure in those imaginations, although he has no will or intention of committing the impure act he is thinking of; while, if he looks at a person of the opposite sex, or reads a love-tale, or spends his time amusing himself and laughing with a person of the opposite sex, how many unchaste thoughts and desires would not one find in his heart, if it could be looked into? But through shame, or fear that, if he committed a sinful act, people might come to know of it, or since he has no hope of being able to fulfil his bad desires, he does nothing wrong outwardly. Now, both these people think themselves innocent, and when they go to confession the one forgets the revengeful, the other the impure thoughts, and neither thinks of repenting of and confessing such thoughts; for, as long as they abstain from sinning in outward action, they imagine that their thoughts and desires are not of importance. If they happen to hear in a sermon, or elsewhere, that it is not lawful to consent to bad thoughts and desires, they fall into a still greater error, by persuading themselves that such consent consists only in action, or at least in a firm purpose and eager desire to do the evil deed when opportunity offers.

A most fatal error, by which the wicked tempter ensnares simple souls and tepid Christians, who seldom come to sermons, or hear any explanation of the Christian doctrine. There is a certain bird of prey, that eats nothing but the heart of the animals it kills, while others eat only the brains. The devil is a bird of prey of both kinds; unceasingly he tries to ensnare our souls; the chief object of his rage is our heart, which he endeavors to conquer by evil suggestions, impure thoughts and imaginations; if he induces the heart to entertain a voluntary pleasure and desire, he has attained his end, and it matters little to him whether the bad action is accomplished or not, because he has already killed the soul and subjected it to himself by the unlawful thoughts and desires. Generally speaking, he devours the brains, too, of such people, after he has betrayed them; that is, he blinds their understanding, so that they make nothing of such thoughts and desires, admit them without fear or shame, in-

They are deceived by the devil.

crease them without number, and retain them without repenting of and detesting them.

Human justice takes no account of thoughts; but divine justice does.

This, I repeat, is a grievous error. Far different is the justice of God from that of man; the latter takes no account of thoughts and desires, not so the former. If I affirmed, even on oath, that a thousand times I had a firm purpose of stealing, murdering, or committing adultery, if the occasion were given me, no earthly judge could condemn me on that account; for, if he cannot prove me guilty of the act, he must acquit me. "Man seeth those things that appear," says the Lord God; "but the Lord beholdeth the heart:"¹ that is, men judge of nothing but what they see, while God wishes to have the whole man as an unspotted sacrifice, not only as to his body, but especially as to his soul and his heart, the most precious part of him. What did it help the foolish virgins that their lamps were clean outwardly, and well-polished, since they had no oil in them? I know you not, said the heavenly Bridegroom to them, when they knocked at the door; away with you! In vain does a man flatter himself that he has preserved his purity of body, if his heart is sullied with unchaste thoughts and desires. Therefore we read in the divine law: "Take away the evil of your devices from My eyes."² "Turn ye from your evil ways, and from your wicked thoughts."³ Our divine Lord tells us that we must not even let our desires tend to evil: "But I say to you: that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart."⁴

One can sin in thought principally, and more dangerously, than in outward act.

So that one can sin, then, by mere thought? Certainly, and that, too, principally, nay, more dangerously than by outward act. Principally, I say, because it is from thoughts that all sins and vices, whatever they may be called, take their origin. Before I do anything evil in action, I must first have the determination and will to do it; and before I can arrive at such a determination, I must necessarily think about it. Therefore Christ, the Eternal Truth, says in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "But the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and those things defile a man: for from the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies," as from the source

¹ Homo enim videt ea quæ patent; Dominus autem intuetur cor.—I. Kings xvi. 7.

² Auferte malum cogitationum vestrarum ab oculis meis.—Isa. i. 16.

³ Convertimini de viliis vestris malis, et de cogitationibus vestris pessimis.—Zach. i. 4.

⁴ Ego autem dico vobis: qui viderit mulierem ad concupiscendum eam, jam moechatus est eam in corde suo.—Matt. v. 28.

whence they derive their origin.' Nay, it is in the heart and soul that the sin is properly committed; for sin consists in the determination of the will to evil, while the outward act, no matter how bad it may be, is no sin, if the heart refuses its consent to it. I have said that sins of thought are more dangerous than sins of action, because, according to the words of the Council of Trent, "sometimes they wound the soul more grievously, and are more dangerous, than those which are committed in outward act."² Why so? Because they are committed with greater facility and less fear; because they are committed oftener and in greater number; because they are generally more difficult to avoid.

Even the detestable name of sinful outward actions is enough to terrify at once a soul that has any conscience left. At the first resolution to do a wrong act the conscience immediately becomes uneasy; and therefore the devil does not try to tempt a pious man at once to an impure act; for he sees clearly enough that he would not succeed. But bad thoughts creep into the heart before one is aware of them; and as they do not cause such shame or fear as outward acts do, they force themselves in gradually, until at last they are deliberately entertained. "Every one that doth evil, hateth the light,"³ says Our Lord. The wrong-doer seeks solitude, and even the most abandoned is not so shameless as to sin outwardly and in the presence of others. But in thought and desire one can sin without shame, at all times, in all places, public or private, in society or alone. Such sins are not visible to others, while opportunity for them is given everywhere; nay, in the holiest places and occupations, in religious houses, in the wildest deserts, in the churches consecrated to divine service, before the altar and the very eye of God, at devotions and prayers, bad thoughts enter the heart and often give one enough to do to drive them away.

Who could count the number of sins committed in a month, a week, or even a day by one who does not know how to guard his heart carefully, and allows it to dwell on bad thoughts? The vindictive, the unchaste man, before gratifying his lust or his revengeful feelings even once in outward act, has already com-

Because
sins of
thought are
more easily
committed.

Because
they are
committed
in greater
numbers.

¹ Quæ autem procedunt de ore, de corde exeunt, et ea inquinant hominem : De corde enim exeunt cogitationes malæ, homicidia, adulteria, fornicationes, furta, falsa testimonia, blasphemia.—Matt. xv. 18, 19

² Nonnunquam animam gravius lædunt, et periculosa sunt illis quæ manifeste admittuntur.—Trid. Sess. xiv.

³ Omnis qui male agit, odit lucem.—John iii. 20.

mitted a hundred sins of thought. To carry out his desires, much and long consideration is required; he has to wait a long time before finding an opportunity, and a hundred plans and means have to be laid aside after having been adopted, before he can attain his end; meanwhile the greater number, nay, almost all of his thoughts and desires, from early morning till late at night, are directed to his fleshly lust or his revenge, and are so many mortal sins; nay, to speak more correctly, are a continued, uninterrupted sin of the heart.

Shown by a
simile.

With reason is the devil compared to a sower, when there is question of sinful thoughts, as we read in the parable in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "But while men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat, and went his way."¹ Do you know, my dear brethren, the difference between sowing and planting? The latter takes some time, while the former can be done quickly; in planting, one thing is set in the ground after another, and very little, indeed, can be done in a quarter of an hour, because everything has to be put in carefully; besides, more room is required, that the things may not be too near each other; they have to be looked after and watered frequently, and, in spite of all that, many of them wither and die. On the other hand, how many seeds can one not scatter in a quarter of an hour? All you have to do is to open your hand and spread them over the ground, and they will produce abundant fruit. "His enemy came and oversowed cockle." That is the way in which the devil acts; he plants sins, as it were, when he incites us men to do unlawful actions; but he sows the sins we commit in thought and desire. All he has to do is to scatter a handful of seeds, that is, of impure or other forbidden images, and then he can go away, and await the result without further trouble; for when that seed is once received and nourished in the heart, sins without number will be the consequence.

Because
they are
generally
more diffi-
cult to
avoid.

From these reasons, namely, because sins of thought are committed with less fear, on account of their causing less shame and of their malice being less acknowledged; because those sins are committed almost without number; and because they generally creep into the heart unforeseen and without any occasion having been given for them, it follows, finally, that no sins are more difficult to avoid than those which are committed by thoughts and imaginations. An unchaste man will refrain from

¹ Cum autem dormirent homines, venit inimicus ejus et superseminavit zizania in medio tritici, et abiit.—Matt. xiii. 25.

impure actions, at least, when he arrives at old age, when his body becomes weakened, and his blood cold, or, else, when the occasion is violently taken away from him, and he has made his peace with God by sincere penance; but that the forbidden pleasures he has enjoyed do not frequently recur to his imagination afterwards,—that, I believe, is contrary to the experience of all men who have any knowledge of this matter, and who would tell us that they who have been in the habit of gratifying their carnal desires, and have been accustomed to take pleasure in impure thoughts, must have great difficulty in immediately and always duly overcoming such thoughts; for the combat they have to sustain is a grievous and dangerous one, that requires an extraordinary help and grace from God.

We know from the Holy Scriptures that they especially who have led sinful lives never run greater danger of eternal damnation than in their death agony; for then, as the holy Evangelist St. John says, the raging demon summons up all his strength in order to ruin their souls in the short time that remains to him, and to lead into sin, and after sin to drag down to hell, those who have escaped from him by true penance. Now, I ask, what sort of a sin would the devil be likely to tempt me to with his suggestions, in my last moments, when I see before my eyes the home of my eternity? To some unlawful, shameful action? No, indeed; for I should not have strength for such a sin as that, nor opportunity, either. Therefore the aim of his temptations must be thoughts and desires alone. And there is no doubt, my dear brethren, they are the means by which the demon betrays and perverts those who abandon God at the last moment. Unchaste Christians, who have lived according to the wanton desires of the flesh, repent of, bewail, and confess your sins when you are on the point of entering into eternity! It is well for you to do so, and I congratulate you with all my heart; nor will I refuse to believe that your repentance and conversion are sincere. But, alas! how I fear for your salvation in that last combat, if the devil should try to re-awaken in your heart impure desires, and to represent to your imagination the object of your former unlawful love, the forbidden pleasures you enjoyed! How will you be able to defend yourselves against such temptations then, since you rarely or never opposed them properly during your lives? How many like you were overcome at the last moment by those assaults of the devil, and hurried down to hell, even after they had done penance!

The dying
are tempted
by the devil
in thought
alone, and
are often
overcome.

Shown by
an example.

From many examples of this I select but one from Father Paul Segneri, which I will briefly relate. A priest had just left the bedside of a dying man, after having heard his confession, full of consolation at the thought of having converted a great sinner to God, even at the last moment; for the dying man had made his confession so well and with such tears of contrition that the priest could not think otherwise than favorably of him. When the priest was about to say Mass and to recommend the soul of his penitent to God, it was announced to him that the man had just died. Thank God! said he, with still greater consolation, that he was so well prepared! I will now say a Requiem Mass for him. But hardly had he put his hand on the sacred vestments, when they were snatched from him violently, and he heard a voice saying to him: "priest of God, where are you going?" "To the altar," answered the latter, "to say Mass for the soul of him whom I prepared for death." "Hold," said the voice, "I am that man; in vain would you offer up the holy sacrifice for me; it cannot help me, for I am lost forever!" "What!" said the terrified priest, "you lost? How can that be? Did you not candidly confess your sins to me before you died, and that, too, with such sincere sorrow that I could not expect from any one better signs of repentance?" "It is true," answered the lost soul; "there was nothing wanting to my confession, sorrow, and repentance." "Perhaps, asked the priest, your purpose was not firm? Yet I saw you myself drive with violence out of your house the person with whom you had committed many sins, and you expressed your firm determination not to have anything more to do with her." "That is also the case," answered the soul; "I was fully in earnest in all that; I was absolved from all the sins I confessed to you; they were and are eternally forgiven me by God; I was in the state of grace, a child of God, and an heir to the kingdom of heaven, and was about to enter into a happy eternity. But, alas! to my irreparable misfortune! hardly had you left me, when the devil represented to my imagination the person whom I had made the object of my sinful passion, and I thought of how she loved me, and how she must have wept and sorrowed when I drove her away. At first I at once resisted the temptation. Away with you! I said in thought; weep as much as you please! Would to God I had never seen you! You are the only cause of my being so unfortunate as to have offended God grievously and frequently! Thus the first attack was happily overcome: and would that I could say as much of the others! Imme-

diately afterwards the devil suggested to me the thought, but if I get well again and am fully restored to health, in case that person comes to me and renews her caresses, will I be able to withstand them, and to put her away from me? There I was caught, because I was not accustomed to conquer in such combats. Oh! I thought, that would be another matter; if I got well again, I certainly would not keep that person away from me. There was nothing more required; after this consent on my part my spirit departed, and now, by a just judgment of God, I am lying in hell."

What think you of this, my dear brethren? Oh, truly, all the souls of the departed cannot come back to tell us how they fare, or else we should find a countless number who lose heaven by similar temptations in their last moments! But mark here the confirmation of the truth I explained to you on another occasion, that amongst a thousand who lead bad lives you will hardly find one to die a happy death, if he does penance only when death is at his door; partly on account of the danger he runs of not sincerely repenting under such circumstances, and partly on account of the danger of not receiving the grace of final perseverance, although he may have sincerely repented, because he has rendered himself unworthy of that grace during his life. Mark, too, how very hard it is for a man who has been accustomed to the odious vice of impurity, and has not learned during life to watch over his heart, to resist bad thoughts and desires even in his last moments. Hence the Holy Ghost warns us all, in the words of the Wise Man: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it." Keep thy heart, O man, from sinful thoughts, if thou art earnestly desirous to persevere in good, for from the heart comes all that is good and bad; life and death come from it. Now, there still remains the question: when are bad thoughts sins? The answer to it we shall see in the

Therefore, they who often sin in thought are in a dangerous state.

Second Part.

Poor, desolate, and lost mortals we should be if all the bad thoughts that occur to our imaginations were sins! We should be lost, I say; for who could then keep from sin? What grown-up person could be amongst the elect? Chosen saints of God! how many of you had the extraordinary privilege conferred on you by God of never being troubled with such thoughts? If we could examine you all, one after the other, we should hardly

It is not a sin, but rather adds to one's merits, to suffer bad thoughts unwillingly.

find one in a thousand who was not sometimes assailed by the most abominable and wicked imaginations. Chastest of souls, who should be called angels rather than men, Jerome, Antony, Benedict, Teresa, Catherine of Siena, Francis Xavier, who led angelic lives in human bodies, you had nevertheless often to fight, even to shedding your blood, in order to defend yourselves from the most horrible thoughts. The great apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul, that chosen vessel of God, even after being raised to the third heaven, could not, with all his prayers and entreaties, as he himself acknowledges, obtain the grace of being freed from such abominable temptations. "Unhappy man that I am," he sighs, how I am troubled! what a vessel of corruption I find in my flesh, which constantly strives against the law of my spirit, and holds me captive like a slave! "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death,"¹ which thus troubles me? This should console you, pious Christians, who at the first appearance of an impure thought are as troubled and uneasy as if you had already committed sin, and all was lost for you. No, you must be of good heart; it is one thing to suffer temptations, and another to allow one's self to be overcome by them; it is one thing to have impure images in the imagination, and another to accept those images and deliberately to take pleasure in them.

Proved
from the
Lives of the
Saints.

"Where wert Thou, Lord Jesus?"² Such was the question that St. Catherine of Siena asked her heavenly Bridegroom, after the devil had been plaguing her for a long time by suggesting to her imagination impure objects, that one must not even describe or think of. "My dear daughter," answered Our Lord, "I was in the midst of thy heart."³ "How?" asked the holy virgin, "how is it possible that Thou couldst remain in the midst of the filth that sullied my heart?" "Tell me," said Christ to her, "did those thoughts please thee?" "Oh, no!" was the answer, "I was never in greater trouble than at the thought of not being able to free myself from them." "For that very reason," answered Our Lord, "thou hast never been more pleasing to Me than thou wert then; for thou wert true to Me in that dangerous and violent combat." Therefore, bad thoughts, no matter how horrible they are, as long as one is displeased at them and tries to resist them, are not only not sinful, but bring a great increase of

¹ Infelix ego homo, quis me liberabit de corpore mortis hujus?—Rom. vii. 24.

² Ubi eras, Domine Jesu?

³ In medio cordis tui.

merit for heaven; not only are they not injurious to chastity and purity, but they make that virtue more beautiful and glorious, like gold that is purified by the fire. God allows His dearest children to be tempted by them, that they may increase in humility, acknowledge their misery, fly for refuge to Him with greater confidence and earnestness, like a child to its mother, when a barking dog frightens it, and that they may guard their outward senses more carefully, avoid all dangers and occasions of sin, and so increase daily in virtue and gain more glory in heaven by conquering in those combats. This was well understood by that hermit, who opened his conscience to his spiritual Father and told him that he was incessantly plagued by the most horrible thoughts. "Be satisfied my son," said the old man to him, "I will beg of God to free you from those temptations." "No," said the other, "do not pray that I may be freed from them, but rather that God may help me by His grace never to consent to them."

Therefore it is consent alone that makes bad thoughts sinful. When and how is this consent given? I will explain it by a simile. A commandant of an important fortress, for instance, Temesvar in Hungary, who was entrusted with the defence of it by the emperor during the Turkish wars, received secretly from Constantinople letters through a disguised spy, containing the offer of a large sum of money, if he would betray the fortress into the hands of the Turks. Now, there are three ways in which the commandant can take and read that letter; in the first place, he may not know where it comes from; he breaks the seal and begins to read, but hardly has he read the first line, when he sees what is asked of him; full of anger, he folds up the letter again and has the man who brought it beheaded; further, without reading another word of it, he sends the letter to the emperor, saying that, if he had known what it contained, he would not even have opened it, but sent it at once, sealed as it was, to Vienna. What would you think of that commandant, my dear brethren? Did he act rightly or not? Was he, perhaps, deserving of punishment, for taking the letter from the enemy, and so holding communication with him? No, he was a true and faithful soldier to his emperor, and acted as all good men should act; so that he deserved a great reward, and instead of having his fidelity suspected, the emperor would for the future have still greater confidence in him, and trust him still more fully than before. In the second place, the commandant, as soon as he sees what are the

Consent
alone makes
the sin :
how it is
given,
shown by a
simile.

contents of the letter, continues to read it and finds pleasure in the promise of the money that is made him. Oh, he says, it would not be a bad thing if I could get that sum, and he considers the matter and asks himself how he could manage the treason so as not to be detected. He takes counsel with the spy as to the plan to be adopted, but still he is not resolved; he really does not wish to betray the fortress, nor does he betray it, but simply allows the spy to go away unpunished, without giving him a decisive answer. What do you think of that? Is he a faithful commandant? No, you think; he did not act honestly, and if the emperor knew of his conduct, he would have good reason for suspecting him, and, if he did not have him put to death, would certainly depose him from his position, and would not trust him any longer; for, although he did not actually determine to give up the fortress, still he was guilty of perjury in treating with the spy about the act of treachery, in his eagerness to receive the promised sum of money. In the third place, the commandant, after having read the letter, and considered the matter, gives as answer to the spy that he will be ready at the first opportunity to deliver the fortress into the hands of the enemy. In that case there is no doubt that he is a traitor, and deserving of the most painful death, although he may not actually deliver up the fortress, through want of opportunity.

In three ways we can deal with bad thoughts; first, meritoriously.

It is nearly the same with us mortals, my dear brethren. Jesus Christ, our King, has entrusted to each one of us a soul, to be guarded for Him alone as its lawful Lord, since He has bought it with His blood. But the sworn enemy of God and man suggests evil thoughts; see, there you have the treacherous letter which he sends us, to persuade us to take away our souls from God and give them to him; he represents to the imagination some alluring object, some enticing beauty, some carnal pleasure; that is the reward he promises us if we give up our souls to him. Now, like the commandant, we can act in three different ways with regard to this letter of the tempter, this evil suggestion. A pious, God-fearing man, the moment he is aware of the evil thought, puts it away at once out of his mind, thinks of something else, and sends the wicked letter to his Master; that is, he sighs to God in heaven with king Ezechias: "Lord, I suffer violence, answer Thou for me;"¹ the hellish wolf is behind me; help me and do not abandon me! see what a horrible proposal

¹ Domine, vim patior: responde pro me. Isa. xxxi. 1. 14.

he is making to me! It is against my will, for I am determined to be faithful to Thee, my sovereign God, forever. And although these thoughts and imaginations return a thousand times, he renews a thousand times his determination, and is always displeased at them, although the flesh finds pleasure in them. O happy soul! these attacks, this wicked suggestion, will not harm you; by means of it you can prove all the better your fidelity to your Master, and can gain still brighter jewels for your crown in heaven.

Another, when he is aware of the bad thoughts, at first continues them through curiosity, and afterwards finds pleasure in deliberately speculating in his imagination on what is presented to it, although he does not resolve, nor has any desire to do any impure outward action; he has only a wilful pleasure in the thoughts. Alas! he is already guilty of perjury towards God! The will has given its consent, not, indeed, to the act, but to the pleasure derived from the thought, although it may last but a moment; the sin is complete, partly, because a wilful, deliberate dwelling on impure thoughts is of itself apt to lead to impure feelings, and partly on account of the proximate danger of consenting to unchaste desires. Therefore, according to theologians, it is not lawful for one who is still unmarried to represent deliberately to himself the pleasure he will have in the married state; nor for a widower to recall the pleasure he lawfully enjoyed when in that state.

Second, sinfully.

Finally, the third not only dwells with deliberation on the impure thoughts, when he is aware of them, but also has the wish and desire to accomplish the impure act when he has the opportunity of doing so. This is a far worse sin than the former, and it must be declared exactly in confession. For it would not be enough for me to say in such a case: I have had wilful pleasure in impure thoughts; I must also add: I have also had the deliberate intention of doing the impure act; and, moreover, I must declare what kind of an act it was that I wished to do. For instance, I have had a desire to see unchaste things, to be guilty of impure touches, to sin with a single or a married person, or with a near relation, or with one consecrated to God; all these different circumstances must be declared in confession, according to the nature of the sin.

The third, the worst of all.

It often happens that one doubts whether he has deliberately dwelt on the impure thoughts and desires, especially when they have remained a long time in the imagination, or, after having

How to act if one doubts whether he

has consent-
ed or not.

been driven away, have returned often. What is to be done in a case of that kind? Spiritual writers generally say that in such a case a pious, God-fearing man, who is firmly resolved not to offend God grievously on any account, and therefore carefully avoids all dangerous occasions, can reasonably conclude that he has not fully consented. On the other hand, one who is given to the vice of impurity, or gratifies the curiosity of his eyes and other outward senses, and goes into all kinds of dangerous company without fear, can and must in such a case look on himself as having committed sin in thought; for, generally speaking, such thoughts are then voluntary, either in themselves, or in their cause.

Exhortation
to guard the
heart care-
fully.

I close with the exhortation of the Holy Ghost: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart." O man, whoever you are, keep your precious soul for your God and Lord, who has given it into your care, and who will one day demand it of you; and that you may do so all the more easily, guard your heart most carefully from all bad thoughts and desires! With what great care does not a man look after his money, lest it should be stolen from him! He will not allow it to remain on the table, although he may believe in the honesty of his servants; it is put away in his coffers, and they are well locked; the door of the room in which the coffer is kept is bolted and barred; the door of the house and the windows are most carefully closed every night; and all this is done to keep a piece of metal from being stolen. Ah, immortal, precious soul, bought by the blood of Jesus Christ! are you, then, of less importance, so that one need not take so much trouble for your sake? Must I, then, lose you for a miserable, momentary thought? Lucifer and countless numbers of angels were hurled from heaven to the pit of hell, where they will burn forever, for one momentary, sinful thought. Alas, so should each of you say to himself; woe to me if I, too, should have to burn there for a voluntary imagination! Unhappy me! how would not the remembrance of my folly torture me!

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion to
avoid bad
thoughts,
and use
every means
against
them.

No, I will not be so foolish! In future I will know better how to guard my heart; I will use every means to prevent bad thoughts from finding room in me. To that end I will close my outward senses to all dangerous objects; I will avoid idleness as the chief pillow on which the devil rests most securely with his wicked suggestions. In the morning, as soon as I awake, I will raise my first thought to God, for that is the time at which the enemy is especially on the watch. If what St. John Climacus says is true,

there is one demon who is called, "the morning precursor;"¹ and his duty is to keep watch at the bed of a sleeping man, and the moment he awakes, to snatch away the first thought from him by an evil imagination. And as experience teaches, there is nothing more dangerous than to lie in bed awake in the morning. Therefore, in future, at the break of day, when I have returned thanks to God and offered to Him by the supernatural intention all my thoughts, words, and actions during the day, my first prayer shall be a protestation that whatever evil suggestions occur to me during the day shall be against my will. I renounce Satan, I will then say, renewing my baptismal vow; and I renounce all his suggestions, the flesh and its desires, the world and its vanities; for, according to theologians, this renewal of the vows is a powerful means against the temptations of the flesh and all witchcraft. If bad thoughts attack me unexpectedly, I shall at once take refuge in flight; that is, as soon as I am aware of them, without further examination or discussion of them, I must put them away at once and turn my thoughts to something else. Carnal desire is called a fire; the first impure thoughts are, as it were, sparks, that help to light that fire. How do I act if by chance a spark of fire falls on my hand? Do I stop to say, where does that come from, I wonder? How has it managed to fall right on my hand? See how it burns into the flesh? I wonder will it stay long there? No, the moment I feel the fire, I shake it off without more ado, and then I look at my hand to see if I am burned or not. Such is the way in which I must act with those sparks from hell, the evil thoughts and imaginations that occur to me. Above all, I will fly to Thee for refuge with humble, child-like confidence, O God of my heart and Lover of chaste souls! I have given my heart to Thee once for all; Thou alone and no other shalt keep possession of it; but see how many fierce enemies surround me at every moment to take this heart of mine; think also on my weakness and misery, on account of which I cannot defend myself without Thee, and therefore I beg of Thee, with Thy servant David: "When my strength shall fail, do not Thou forsake me, O God; be not Thou far from me; O God, make haste to my help."² Help me to keep a pure heart, that I may arrive where nothing defiled may enter, that is, to Thee, in Thy kingdom of heaven, where my heart shall rejoice, and my joy no man shall take from me. Amen.

¹ *Præcursor matutinus.*

² *Cum defecerit virtus mea ne derelinquas me. Ne elongeris a me; Deus meus, in auxilium meum respice.—Ps. lxx. 9, 12.*

*FIFTY-FIFTH SERMON.***ON GUARDING THE EYES.****Subject.**

He who allows his eyes to wander about unchecked in every direction will not long remain free from sin, nor persevere in good.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Et jam non videbitis me.—John xvi. 16.

“And now you shall not see Me.”

Introduction.

This is a curious thing, my dear brethren. Who could ever imagine that the sacred presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ could be injurious to His disciples? And yet He says expressly, I am going away from you, and you will not see Me any more; “but I tell you the truth; it is expedient to you that I go;” it is better for you not to see Me any more, than if I were to remain amongst you. Do you wish to know why? “If I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you.” The consolation you have in My presence (so commentators interpret the passage) is only a sensible one; this must be taken away from you, if you wish to receive the consolation and grace of the Holy Ghost. But I cannot help thinking, if the consoling presence of Our Lord on earth was incompatible with the presence by grace of the Holy Ghost, how, then, can that grace consist with vain, carnal glances at earthly beauties, and dangerous objects, in whose presence we are everywhere in this world, unless they are removed from our sight, or we violently turn away our eyes from them? Oh, certainly, my dear brethren, as I showed in my last sermon towards the end, a necessary means of guarding the heart and keeping it in the grace of God is watchfulness over our outward senses, especially the eyes. There you have the whole subject of this exhortation. Namely:

Plan of Discourse.

He who allows his eyes to wander about curiously on all sides will not long remain free from sin, nor persevere in grace. Therefore we must all be especially watchful over our eyes.

Help us thereto by Thy powerful grace, O all-seeing God, through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

Amongst all our outward senses, there is none from which physicians are better able to form a judgment with regard to our constitution and the state of our health, than from our eyes. According to Hippocrates, the prince and master of physicians, "from no part of the body can so many symptoms be derived, as from the eyes; if the eyes are healthy, the whole body is healthy."¹ And with greater certainty still might I say that amongst all the outward senses there is none from which we can better judge the state of the soul, as to whether it is healthy or not, than from the eyes. The Holy Ghost, who cannot deceive, says by the Wise Ecclesiasticus: "The fornication of a woman shall be known by the haughtiness of her eyes, and by her eye-lids;" (and the same is to be understood of men); therefore, "take heed of the impudence of her eyes."² It is a rare and unusual occurrence for the fire of lust not to be ignited, when the eyes are allowed to rest on a person of the other sex. Bad thoughts, as we have seen in the last sermon, are treacherous letters which the enemy of our souls sends to our hearts, in which he tries to dwell by impure images, to persuade them to give up our souls to him. The spies who bring those letters are generally the eyes. "Death is come up through our windows;"³ says the Prophet Jeremias. The look is followed by the thought, the thought by pleasure, and pleasure by consent.

It is an undoubted truth, which even blind heathens have found out by experience, that the eyes first lead to impure love; therefore Seleucus, a heathen legislator, commanded that, as a first punishment for adulterers, their eyes should be plucked out, because, he said, that part should first suffer which was the first cause of the crime. When the Holy Scripture speaks against sin, it often alludes to and condemns the eyes alone, as the chief cause of sin. Thus God, by the Prophet Ezechiel, speaking of idolators, does not condemn the persons themselves expressly, but their eyes: "I have broken their heart, that was faithless and revolted from Me, and their eyes, that went a whoring after their idols."⁴ In the same way He reproaches, not

The eyes generally show what a person's constitution is, and lead to evil.

Therefore the eyes alone are often blamed by God and man for sin committed.

¹ Nulla ex parte tot signa, quam ex oculis accipiuntur; ut valent oculi, sic totum corpus.

² Fornicatio mulieris in extollentia oculorum, et in palpebris illius agnosceatur. Ab omni irreverentia oculorum ejus cave.—Ecclesi. xxvi. 12, 14.

³ Ascendit mors per fenestras nostras.—Jerem. ix. 21.

⁴ Contrivi cor eorum fornicans, et recedens a me; et oculos eorum fornicantes post idola sua.—Ezech. vi. 9.

the envious themselves, but their eyes : "The eye of the envious is wicked." He calls, not the avaricious, but their eyes, insatiable : "The eye of the covetous man is insatiable in his portion of iniquity ; he will not be satisfied till he consume his own soul, drying it up." In a word, in order that we may avoid all transgressions of the law, God warns us to mortify our eyes : "Let every man cast away the scandals of his eyes," He says by the Prophet Ezechiel. "But they provoked Me and would not hearken to Me ; they did not, every man, cast away the abominations of his eyes, and I said I would pour out My indignation upon them." O eyes ! as grateful, useful, and necessary as your beautiful light is to the body, so dangerous are ye to the soul !

And blind men are looked upon as fortunate by the saints.

A blind man is a poor man ! Such is the cry of the blind beggars on the streets ; but with regard to the welfare of the soul, I hear sensible people exclaim, a blind man is a happy man ! Such was the opinion of Peter, abbot of Clairvaux, when the doctor told him that the illness from which he was suffering would cause him to lose the sight of one eye. "Happy man that I am," said Peter, "I shall now have to fight with but one enemy, instead of two ! Such, too, was the belief of Narsetes, bishop of Chalcedon, who became blind, as we read in the life of St. Athanasius. Julian the Apostate cried out to him in a mocking tone the following blasphemy : "What a fine God must Christ the Galilean be, since He cannot preserve your sight!" "You are greatly mistaken," answered Narsetes ; "Christ, my true God, could not have given me a greater grace than to take away my sight, that I may not see such a wicked wretch as you, nor many other dangerous objects. So dangerous are the eyes, when they are not well watched.

It is dangerous, then, to look curiously at another's beauty.

Now I ask each one of you, Christians, do you intend to avoid sin, and to keep on the right road to heaven ? if so, what about your eyes ? Do you allow them to wander about unhindered ? Do you give them full liberty to gaze on everything that presents itself to them ? Do you permit them to look with deliberate curiosity at persons of the opposite sex and to take pleasure in such looks ? Do you wish to see and to be seen ? Alas ! if so, I ven-

¹ Nequam est oculus lividi.—Eccius. xiv. 8.

² Insatiabilis oculus cupidus in parte iniquitatis ; non satiabitur donec consumat arefaciens animam suam.—Ibid. 9.

³ Unusquisque offensiones oculorum suorum abjiciat. Et irritaverunt me, et noluerunt me audire ; unusquisque abominaciones oculorum suorum non projectit ; et dixi ut effunderem indignationem meam super eos.—Ezech. xx. 7, 8.

ture to prophesy with St. Augustine, no matter how innocent, pious, and firm in your good resolution you are now, your piety will not last long; you will not have a chaste heart, if your eyes are not modest; you will in a short time have to sigh forth, with the Prophet Jeremias: "My eye hath wasted my soul!"¹ My soul has hitherto been rich in the treasures of divine grace it had collected; one curious look has robbed me of all those riches. "I saw and was lost," you will have to acknowledge with the poet.² In the morning I confessed my sins with the firm resolution rather to die a thousand times than again offend my God; and yet on the very same day I looked on a dangerous object, and stained my conscience by a new sin: "I saw and was lost." After hearing that sermon about the eternal truth, I thought heaven and earth would perish before I should resolve to offend God again; but, alas! one imprudent glance has made me forget my resolution: "I saw and was lost." I went into the church in a state of innocence, to hear holy Mass, and to beg many graces from God, but I came away laden with mortal sin; and that was the result of a single glance at another's beauty, in which I took pleasure. I saw and was lost. "Lust," says St. Thomas of Aquin, "can hardly be avoided, unless its beginning, namely looking at a woman's beauty, be avoided."³ Therefore the Holy Ghost warns us by the Wise Ecclesiasticus: "Look not upon a woman, lest thou fall into her snares: gaze not upon a maiden, lest her beauty be a stumbling block to thee; look not round about thee in the ways of the city, nor wander up and down in the streets thereof: turn away thy face from a woman dressed up, and gaze not upon another's beauty."⁴ Mark, my dear brethren, how often in the one chapter God warns us to guard our eyes.

What! some will say; must we, then, go about like blind men? Why has my Creator given me eyes, if not that I may use them? And what harm is it for me to look at what pleases me? What! I answer; your Creator has given you ears to hear; are you therefore allowed to hear anything you please? He has given you a tongue to speak; can you therefore say whatever you like?

The danger shown by smiles.

¹ *Oculus meus deprædatus est animam meam.*—Lament. iii. 51.

² *Ut vidi, ut perii.*

³ *Luxuria vitari vix potest, nisi vitetur principium ejus, scilicet aspectus mulieris pulchræ.*—St. Thomas, II. 2, q. 167, a. 2.

⁴ *Ne respicias mulierem, ne forte incidas in laqueos illius: virginem ne conspicias, ne forte scandalizeris in decore illius: noli circumspicere in viis civitatis, nec oberraveris in plateis illius: averte faciem tuam a muliere compta, et ne circumspicias speciem alienam.* Eccclus. ix. 3, 5, 7, 8.

He has given you hands to stretch forth, but not to take everything that it would please you to have. And yet you are not obliged to go about deaf, dumb, or lame. Truly, you have eyes to see with, but not to look at everything you please; otherwise the Holy Ghost would not warn you so often to keep from gazing at another's beauty; yet you are not forced on that account to go about like a blind man. What harm is there in it? you ask. And I ask you, what harm is it for a little child to take a knife in its hand? And yet you do not allow him to keep it. Why? He has not yet cut himself with it. That may be, you reply; but it is very dangerous, and he might hurt himself with it. I answer you, in the words of St. Ambrose: "Seeing in itself is not sinful; but take care lest it be the beginning of sin."¹ The eye is the only member that can cause death when it is wounded. In former times it caused the death of Henry II., king of France. During a marriage festivity this young monarch held a tournament, in which he wished to give a proof of his skill in arms. He appeared on the ground on horse-back, clad in full armor, so that it was impossible for a blow to reach his body; his eyes were the only part that he was obliged to leave uncovered, and they actually opened the door to death; for a splinter of a broken lance struck him in the eye and wounded him mortally. A similar tragedy is often enacted by our enemy, the devil, with our souls; many a pious man arms himself on all sides against his attacks and temptations; he arms his head with salutary meditations and spiritual exercises, so as to keep off bad thoughts; he arms his tongue with frequent confession and Communion against unchaste talk, cursing, and swearing; he arms his ears against uncharitable talk, by diligently hearing the word of God in sermons; in his hands he bears the prayer-book and rosary; on his breast he has the scapular and relics of the saints; but if his eyes alone are unarmed, the devil has room enough to enter and wound the soul mortally.

Many are
thereby led
into sin,

What harm was it for Eve, our first mother, to look at the forbidden fruit in paradise? And yet, that one look brought death to her and to us all. St. Bernard, in one of his meditations, thus apostrophizes her: "Why, O Eve, dost thou look so intently on thy own death? Why does it please thee to look at that which thou art not allowed to taste?"² Ah! said Eve, let

¹ Non vidisse crimen est; sed cavendum est ne origo criminis sit.—S. Ambr. l. 1 de poenit., c. 13.

² Quid tuam mortem tam intente intueris, Eva? Quid spectare libet, quod manducare non licet?

me look at it! do not be afraid; I will only admire the fruit, and will not stretch forth my hand to pluck it; I am not forbidden to look, but only to eat. But alas, Eve! if thou hadst not looked, thou wouldst not have eaten, and thou and all of us would not have lost paradise! Eating followed seeing, and the sin was consummated. What harm was it for the wife of Pharaoh to look at her servant Joseph? "And after many days," says the Holy Scripture, "his mistress cast her eyes on Joseph:"¹ but when she did so, shame, honor, and conjugal fidelity were cast to the winds. "While she kept her eyes cast down," says Oleaster, "she did not sin; but when she raised them, she suffered scandal,"² and fell shamefully through impure desires. What harm was it for David, that holy king, to look out through the windows of his palace at Bethsabee? And yet, if he had not done so, he would not have become an adulterer and a murderer. "He would not have committed adultery," says St. Ambrose, "if he had not looked."³ David, says St. Gregory, did not look at the wife of Urias because he lusted after her, "but he lusted after her because he looked at her."⁴ What harm was it for Ammon to look at his own sister? And yet those looks of his led him into incest. But what need is there of proof? Often enough we hear in our own days people giving expression to the heartfelt wish, after they have been converted, ah, would that I had never seen that person; I would not have fallen into sin! And how many would still be innocent, if they had been blind, or had not incautiously indulged their curiosity?

O dear Christians, keep the windows closed, if you do not wish to be robbed of a great treasure! Guard your eyes carefully, if you really wish to persevere in the friendship of God! If an angel had foretold to our first mother in paradise what would follow if she looked at the forbidden fruit, and had said to her: Eve, go away from that tree! close your eyes at once! if you look at the fruit, it will take your fancy, you will stretch out your hand for it, put it to your mouth, and eat it; then you will induce your husband to follow your example; after which you will be driven out of paradise and condemned to death with all your posterity,—if Eve had known all this, would she have been so incautious as not to have mortified her eyes? If the Prophet Nathan had gone to David when the latter opened

Who would have restrained their curiosity, had they foreknown the evil effects of it.

¹ Post multos dies iniecit domina sua oculos suos in Joseph.—Gen. xxxix. 7.

² Quamdiu oculos habuit demissos, non peccavit; cum vero levavit, scandalum passa est.

³ Non adulterasset, nisi adspexisset.

⁴ Sed ideo concupivit quia incaute respexit.

the window of his palace, and was about to look out into his garden, and had said to him in the name of God: O David, what are you about to do? It would be better for you to fall down and break your neck! You will forget your God completely, whom you have hitherto loved above all things, and who has written you in His heart; you will become a murderer and an adulterer; "therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house,"¹ your favorite child will die; one of your daughters will be dishonored by her brother; your son Absalom will drive you from your throne and persecute you until he dies on a tree in the state of sin and is lost forever; you will be made a laughing-stock to your own subjects, who will vilify and throw stones at you like a hunted dog, and all this will be as a punishment for your sin. You will try to hide your sin: "Thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing in the sight of all Israel, and in the sight of the sun."² Till the last day the world will speak of the abominations you have committed; and you yourself will henceforth water your couch with your tears, and eat ashes with your bread, through sorrow and repentance. If such a dreadful announcement were made to this pious king, as he then was, what would he have thought, my dear brethren? Would he have been so foolish as still to have gratified his curiosity? That is not likely. And yet one incautious glance, without his foreseeing any harm, or having the least bad intention, brought all that evil on him.

Therefore all, especially the young, must guard their eyes, or else they will be led into sin.

Dissolute young man! vain girl! weak mortals, of whatever age, condition, or position you may be! I am not, indeed, a prophet, much less an angel; yet, when I consider the law of God, the miseries of our corrupt nature, its wicked inclinations, and the power that an alluring object has over it, I can easily foretell what will happen to you. If you do not learn to keep your eyes always in check; if you give them full liberty to gaze at everything that offers itself to them; if you cast them freely on persons of the opposite sex; if you mix unrestrainedly in all kinds of company, then you may be assured that it will soon be all up with your purity of heart. You will be guilty of murder and incest, if not in reality, at least in inclination and desire; some of you will be tormented day and night by the spirit of impure love, which will give you no rest; some will seek opportunities, and consume the best years of their lives in impurity;

¹ Quamobrem non recedet gladius de domo tua usque in sempiternum.—II. Kings xli. 10.

² Tu fecisti abscondite; ego autem faciam verbum istud in conspectu omnis Israel, et in conspectu solis.—Ibid. xli.

some will be addicted to that vice till their old age, nay, till their death; some will perhaps indulge in it publicly, before the whole town, and then, hear what follows: "Thus saith the Lord:" "If any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are."¹

How many like you, even in Christian times, have had experience of this? I bring forward as a warning to you the example of one young man, whose fate St. Augustine bitterly bewails in his "Confessions." His name was Nebridius, and at first he was pious and inclined to virtue; but he was of a vain and pleasure-loving disposition, and was very fond of mixed company. On one occasion, when certain shows were publicly exhibited for the amusement of the people, at which Christians were forbidden to appear, on account of the danger of seeing some things against holy purity, Augustine went to him, and representing the great danger he would run by going to those shows, induced him to promise that he would keep away from them. But another companion unexpectedly came to Nebridius and made him alter his determination and go with him to see the show. He remembered what he had promised to Augustine, and to God as well; his conscience was very uneasy and he would have come victorious out of the struggle, if the devil had not interfered and suggested to him craftily a means of getting out of the difficulty; for the incautious Nebridius resolved to go, in order not to offend his friend, and to remain in the theatre, but to close his eyes all the time, so as not to see anything of what was going on. Thus, he thought, I shall satisfy God and Augustine, inasmuch as I will keep my promise; I shall consult the repose of my conscience, for I will avoid all danger; and at the same time I shall gratify my friend. The show begins, the curtain is raised, and every one is silent in expectation. The actors and actresses strut about on the stage in magnificent costumes; Nebridius is for a considerable time unmoved, and keeps his eyes closed, so that he does not see the least of what is going on. But all of a sudden a great cry is raised among the audience; well done! very good! bravo! they exclaim. This uproar excites the curiosity of Nebridius. He opened his eyes,² says St. Augustine; and what then? He cried out with the others;³ and what more? When he saw the dangerous objects that were presented to his view, he

As was the case with many. Shown by example.

¹ Si quis autem templum Dei violaverit, disperdet illum Deus. Templum enim Dei sanctum est, quod estis vos.—I. Cor. iii. 17.

² Spectavit.

³ Clamavit.

was inflamed with the fire of impure love.¹ What followed thereon? He entered into that place full of sanctifying grace, full of the fear of God; and he came out full of the madness of impure passion, blinded and consumed by it.² "Let all," I must say, in the words of St. John Chrysostom, "take warning by this, who are fond of admiring others' beauty, and who are passionately addicted to theatre going."³ O Christians, be careful to keep the windows of your eyes well closed! Pray to God frequently to that end with the Prophet David, after he had been warned by his own misfortune: "Turn away my eyes, that they may not behold vanity:"⁴ that I may never cast them on dangerous objects.

The same is to be said, with even greater reason, of bad books.

What I have said hitherto of the eyes, with regard to keeping them from gazing on dangerous objects, or looking with curiosity at persons of the opposite sex, is even more necessary to be observed with regard to dangerous reading. Just as there is nothing more useful for us if we wish to persevere in good, and to become more devout, than the reading of spiritual books and the Lives of the Saints (to which all good Christians should devote some time on Sundays and holy-days, and those who have nothing to do, half an hour every day), so also there is nothing more injurious, especially to holy purity, than the reading of books that treat of unchaste subjects and impure love tales. This is an accursed invention of the devil, with which he endeavors to infect hearts, as with a pestilence, while his attacks in this way are directed chiefly against the young, whom he tries to bewitch, and to lead astray; nor is he hardly ever disappointed; for if he can only induce a person to read a book of that kind through curiosity, he can make sure of his soul. Alas, he scatters those abominable books abroad in all places, at all times, by wicked agents and hellish sleuth-hounds! Are not we poor mortals already versed enough, of our own corrupt nature, in this filthy knowledge, without being under the necessity of being taught by those agents of the devil how to have no regard for holy purity?

Especially of love-tales and romances.

Still, the crafty tempter knows well that with respectable people, who have some regard for their souls, he can do little by books that are openly immoral; if he put such books in their way, he would rather disgust them than attract their attention.

¹ Exarsit.

² Abstulit inde insaniam.

³ Audiant hæc curiosi, qui pulchritudines considerant alienas; audiant qui insaniant spectaculis theatralibus.

⁴ Averte oculos meos, ne videant vanitatem—Ps. cxviii. 27.

How does he act, then, in order to ensnare their souls? He places before their eyes amusing comedies, well-written romances, long-winded love-stories full of incident, which are in reality more dangerous to souls, the more cunningly they conceal the filth they contain, the more they are able to amuse, and the more eager they make the reader to know the end of the story. Meanwhile they fill the heart and mind with violent and unruly passion, and softly fan the flame of impurity, feeding it and keeping it alive. Eternal truths, which should and ought to lead us to heaven, you are often explained in sermons, and are sometimes listened to with pleasure! But, alas, how soon you are forgotten! Hardly is the sermon over, when you are no longer thought of! But those love stories generally so captivate the imagination and the memory of young people, that sometimes they are not forgotten for quite a quarter of a year.

But, they say, there is nothing wrong in those books. I read them only for the sake of the language, and the skill shown in developing the plot. A fine excuse, indeed! You must be a great admirer of fine language! There are Lives of the Saints and similar spiritual books enough published, which are written even in a better style, and are filled with still more wonderful and true incidents, which raise up the mind and heart to heaven and heavenly things, and teach us how to amend our lives; why do you not read those books with the same pleasure and eagerness? They are not mere fictions, which betray your understanding; they are true, and can instruct you not only in the beauties of style, but also in the duties of a Christian life, and in what you have to do to save your soul. Why, I ask again, do you not prefer those books to the others? Is it not because they do not gratify your sensuality? And even if those romances and love tales were better written, should you not be more anxious about the purity of your soul than about the elegance of your style? more careful to live well, than to speak well? to be learned in the school of Christ, than in that of the demon of impurity? Do you know what happened to St. Jerome? He describes it himself, and swears to the truth of it. When he was at Rome in his young days, he was so anxious to learn the art of oratory, that he would even forget his meals in order to read Plautus and Cicero. "Miserable wretch that I was," he says. "I fasted when about to read Cicero. After frequent night-watching, after the hot tears which the recollection of my former sins forced from the depths of my heart, I used to take Plautus in

No one
should on
any account
read or keep
such books.

my hands,"¹ in order to amuse myself with his rhymes. That kind of reading did not fill his mind with dangerous thoughts, nor place him in danger of sin; yet it hindered him considerably in the course of his spiritual life, and was the cause of his afterwards finding no relish in spiritual books, on account of the unpolished style in which they were written. "Whilst the old serpent was thus deceiving me,"² I was suddenly taken ill, and was rapt up before the judgment-seat of God. "Being asked about my condition, I answered that I was a Christian."³ But the Judge, looking at me, said: "thou liest! thou art not a Christian, but a Ciceronian; for where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also."⁴ Then, at the command of the Judge, poor Jerome was so severely beaten, that he could not endure the pain. O God, have mercy! he cried out; O God, have mercy! But to no purpose, until at last the by-standers begged of the Judge to consider the age of the thoughtless young man, to spare him, and give him time to amend. When he had given his solemn word never more to waste his time in reading vain books, he was released, and returned to himself. This was not a mere vision; for the Saint himself affirms on oath that his shoulders were actually marked with the stripes inflicted on him. Think of this, O Christian! St. Jerome did not read the licentious poems of a Martial or an Ovid, but Cicero, a book which is as pure in morals as in Latinity, and which does not suggest any evil thoughts or desires; besides, his only idea was to admire the beauties of the style; and yet, since his spirit was rendered cold to heavenly things by reading of that kind, God caused him to be punished severely. How, then, will it be with you and others like you at the divine tribunal, since you so often read those vain love tales, that are so ruinous to morals? What answer will you make when asked what you are? Will you dare to say, I am a Christian? "Thou liest," the Judge will answer; you are an Ovidian, a Catullian, a reader of romances, and not a Christian. Certainly, as far as my opinion goes, I do not see how any one can conscientiously read those books, or give them to others, or even keep them in his house, to the great risk of

¹ Miser ego, lecturus Tullium, jejunabam. Post noctium crebras vigilas, post lachrymas, quas mihi præteritorum recordatio peccatorum ex imis visceribus eruebat, Plautus sumebatur in manibus.—Hieron. ep. xxii. ad Euseb.

² Dum antiquus serpens ita me illuderet.

³ Interrogatus de conditione, Christianum me esse, respondi.

⁴ Mentiris, ait; Ciceronianus es, non Christianus; ubi enim thesaurus tuus, ibi et cor tuum.

having them fall into the hands of people who will be scandalized by them and led into sin.

Do you wish to act as a good Christian? Then pitch those filthy books at once into the fire, as an agreeable burnt-offering to God. Better for you to do that, than for one soul to be cast into the fire of hell. In the Life of Stanislaus Hosius, who was afterwards a celebrated cardinal of holy Church, it is related that, while he was a student in Cracow, he used often to visit another young man of his own age, who was for a long time lying sick in bed, and could not be cured by all the medicines that were given to him. One day Hosius saw a book under the sick man's pillow; he took it up and found that it was a romance, when, turning at once to his friend, "see," he said, "this is your fever, this is the illness you are so long suffering from." "You cannot recover, until you get rid of the cause of your illness. So saying, he took the book home with him, with the sick man's permission, and threw it in the fire. The next day he repeated his visit, and found the young man quite restored to health; having asked at what time he recovered, he found that it was exactly at the same hour in which the dangerous book was cast into the fire. O Christians, is one of you, perhaps, sick, through a book of that kind, of the fever of which St. Ambrose says "our fever is lust; our fever is impurity"? Oh, in that case let him at once throw the book in the fire, if he wishes to recover the health of his soul, and ask God to forgive him for not having done so long ago, with the firm purpose of never taking such a book in his hands again.

I am ashamed to speak here of those indecent pictures and statues, which may be seen here and there in private houses, and which in public gardens are exposed to the gaze of every one. O chaste souls, turn away your eyes from such things, even if they are supposed to represent the saints of God, as, alas, is sometimes the case; for in this matter, too, the devil shows his cunning in trying to deceive souls under the pretext of devotion. Woe to those painters and sculptors who are the authors of pictures and statues of that kind. For such things are far more dangerous than anything of which I have spoken hitherto. It is true that the living human form is apt to seduce even the holiest; but there is no one so shameless as to appear in public in the disgraceful style in which those works of art are exhibited. And

But they
should be
burnt at
once.

The most
dangerous
objects for
the eyes are
indecent
pictures and
statues

¹ Hæc est, inquit, ista febris, quæ te adeo graviter excruciat.—Stanisl. Resc. in vita, l. i., c. 5.

² Febris nostra libido est; febris nostra luxuria est.—Ambr. l. iv., in c. iv. Luke.

the eyes can be fixed on them all the more boldly under the pretext of admiring the skill the artist has displayed. An impure book can be read by but one person at a time; but those impure statues and pictures can be seen by every one at the same time. There are many who cannot even read, so that they have no danger to dread from impure books, unless they hear them read by others; but all except the blind alone can see those images, and thus the scandal is widespread.

Woe to
those who
exhibit such
things.

“Woe to the man by whom the scandal cometh!” I must cry out here, in the threatening words of Our Lord, against all those who give to others occasion of sin, by placing bad books in their way, or by allowing them to look at indecent statues or pictures, or by not observing the rules of modesty in their own dress; for all those things are so many snares to catch souls and to betray them into the clutches of the devil. Theologians teach that a woman (and the same is to be understood of a man) who knows for certain that she is the object of an impure affection commits a mortal sin if, without necessity or reasonable cause, she puts herself deliberately in the way of being seen by that man, although she has no intention or wish to excite an impure passion in him thereby, because without sufficient cause she is the occasion of awaking and inflaming his passion. Now, I say that, if the law of Christian charity binds every one, in order to avoid giving others an occasion of sin, not to appear before a person in whom a sinful desire might be awakened, even when clad with a due regard to modesty, how, then, will they be able to answer to God for their actions, who deliberately place in the way of others objects that are of their nature apt to incite them to sinful thoughts and desires? Woe to that man! All the sins others commit through his instrumentality will be recorded against him, although he may not have had the deliberate wish or intention to lead others into sin.

Woe to
parents who
do not look
after their
children in
this respect.

If time permitted, I might here give vent to a bitter complaint against those careless parents, who allow their innocent little children to see things that would be unlawful amongst unmarried people. Let no one tell me that the children are too young, and that they do not understand. Granted that they do not understand it now, are not the impressions of such things imprinted on their imaginations and memories, so that they will never be eradicated? If you have not another room in your house for your children, it were better to let them go and stay in the pig-sty, than see what could be an occasion of scandal to them

and ruin their precious souls. And I might complain, too, of those parents who allow their grown-up daughters too much liberty, and permit them to spend their time at the window or door, in order to see and be seen. There are parents who toil and moil from morning till night, while their daughters know how to do nothing but deck themselves out in the latest fashions, and let themselves be seen, in the way I have described.

Parents, watch over your children more carefully! Fish are never safe, unless when they are in the water; if they leave their own element, they must die in a short time. Never are your daughters safer than at home, under your own eyes, and occupied with some work befitting their condition. The goods exposed in the shop windows are either damaged, or are in a fair way to become so. No matter how pious, devout, and innocent your daughters may be, if they are fond of seeing and being seen, although they may not do anything wrong outwardly, yet they will have wickedness enough in their hearts. Hear what St. Cyprian says: "When young maidens begin to go about too freely, they soon lose their virtue, as their hearts become sullied with sinful thoughts and desires."¹

Children who are fond of seeing and being seen are not free from sin.

Well known is the incident that occurred to St. Antoninus, Shown by an example. archbishop of Florence, as described at length in the history of his life by Surius. The holy man once happened to pass by a poor and small house, when he saw at the window a choir of angels holding a joyful feast. Ah, dear angels, said he, what are you doing here? This must certainly be a paradise on earth, since it gives you such pleasure to dwell here! And, anxious to know who was living in the house, he entered it, and saw in a room a poor widow with three grown-up daughters, who, although poor, were decently clad, and the mother and children were occupied with some domestic, manual work. Antoninus, having greeted the mother (for none of the daughters dared to raise her eyes from her work to look at him), asked her how she managed to live. The mother answered humbly: "I live as you see; every morning we hear Mass, and then spend the whole day in this room, working; sometimes we say the rosary together; otherwise we are content in the midst of our poverty, and have full confidence in our heavenly Father, who has not allowed us to suffer hunger up to the present." The holy man, edified by their innocent lives, gave them some spiritual consolation, and encouraged them to persevere; but when he got to his own home, he

¹ Dum publice evagant virgines volunt, esse virgines desierunt, furtivo dedecore vitiantur.

sent the mother a purse of money, telling her at the same time that she should not lose heart, for as long as he was alive she and her daughters would not want. Some months afterwards he came back to visit what he thought that paradise on earth, which was quite concealed from the eyes of the world; but, alas, what a sad change he found! In the windows of the house, instead of angels, he saw a troop of hideous demons, giving signs of the greatest exultation. What is all this about? he asked in astonishment. The good people must have moved from here. But, as he soon discovered, it was not the house, but the morals of the inhabitants that had changed. For the three daughters, having some money in hand, and relying on the comforting assurance that the bishop had given them, gradually fell away from their industrious habits, until at last they abandoned them altogether, and spent their time in dressing and standing at the door: thus many people became acquainted with them, and in a few weeks they were changed from pure doves into hideous owls of night. O curiosity and idleness! so quickly can you turn a paradise, which by its retirement and modesty was a dwelling fit for the angels, into a hell and a habitation for demons.

Conclusion
and resolution
to
guard the
eyes.

Ah, parents, whom God has so solemnly entrusted with the souls of your children, the wise Ecclesiasticus warns you: "On a daughter that turneth not away herself, set a strict watch; lest, finding an opportunity, she abuse herself."¹ Father, look after your son! Mother, watch over your daughter, and keep her at work at home constantly; "take heed of the impudence of her eyes, and wonder not if she slight thee."² If you let her have too much of her own way, you must not be surprised to find her dead to all shame in the end; but know that the Lord will require her soul at your hands. Christians, of whatever condition, sex, or age you may be, guard your eyes from all curious and vain glances, if you wish to persevere in the grace and service of God. Alas, in what fragile vases we carry about the precious treasure of sanctifying grace! Our own carnal desires are always dragging us towards sin of their own accord, and we often complain of our weakness and evil inclinations; why, then, should we open the doors and windows to further temptations?

¹ In filia non avertente se, firma custodiam, ne inventa occasione, utatur se.—Eccius. xxvi. 13.

² Ab omni irreverentia oculorum ejus cave, et ne mireris si te neglexerit. —Ibid. 14.

So it is, O my God! I acknowledge that I have often been surprised at my own inconstancy in Thy service; but now I know the reason of it. My heart has hitherto been like an open house, to which all kinds of objects have had free admission. Thou hast often warned me to pluck out my eye, and cast it from me, if it is an occasion of sin to me, for it is better that I should go to heaven with one eye, than to go to hell with two. Ah! I now confess that it would often have been better for my soul if I had been blind altogether; for then many sins of thought and action would not have been committed. “Would that my eyes had never seen anything,” I must sigh with St. Bernard, “if they are to be the occasion of my being deprived of the sight of God, which may He avert!”¹ Henceforth I will guard my eyes more carefully; I will make a covenant with them, like Thy faithful servant Job, so that not even a thought of anything evil may be suggested to me; I will cast them humbly down to earth, and think that, though they have one day to decay in the earth, and though I must now mortify them, yet they will see my Saviour in the glory of His resurrection. Then, full of confidence and consolation, I will raise them up to heaven, and will think, there is my true country, in which I shall see my God forever. Therefore, eyes, spare me now! have a little patience and restrain yourselves for a short time; the beauty of creatures is not worth your consideration! In a little while I will give you pleasure enough in heaven, where you may gaze forever on the infinite God, on Jesus Christ, the most beautiful of the children of men, on Mary, the beautiful Spouse of the Holy Ghost, and on all the elect of God! Reserve your curiosity till then! Amen.

*FIFTY-SIXTH SERMON.***ON PRAYER FOR PERSEVERANCE IN GOOD.****Subject.**

Fervent prayer to God is an absolutely necessary means for all men to persevere in good and to save their souls.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday after Easter.*

¹ *Utinam nihil unquam vidisset oculus meus, si illa, quod avertat Deus! frustrandus est visio.*

Text.

Petite, et accipietis.—John xvi. 24.

“Ask, and you shall receive.”

Introduction.

There we have the surest, most powerful, and at the same time the most necessary means of obtaining from the almighty God all that is good for our souls and bodies. I have already spoken to you, my dear brethren, of different means that we must make use of in order to persevere in good; one of them is to guard the heart from bad thoughts and desires; another is to guard the eyes from dangerous curiosity. But all this will be of little use, if we omit praying to God, or pray but seldom; as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

Fervent prayer to God is an absolutely necessary means for all men, in order that they may persevere in good and save their souls; therefore, he who wishes to be saved must pray. Such is the whole subject.

Most faithful God! Thy promises cannot deceive us; Thou hast said: “Ask and you shall receive.” One petition we have to lay before Thee to-day by the hands of Mary, the Mother of Thy Son, and our holy guardian angels; move and impel us for the future to pray to Thee constantly; for then we shall be sure of receiving all the other graces we stand in need of, according to Thy promise, “Ask and you shall receive.”

Our need
compels us
to pray fer-
vently to
God, be-
cause of
ourselves
we are frail
mortals.

That is for me an absolutely necessary means to which I am obliged to have recourse by my own wants, and without which I cannot free myself from misery. Thus, for the poor man, who is hungry, and has no bread or anything else to eat, the only means left to avoid dying of hunger is to beg food and drink from charitable people, since he cannot procure it in any other way. A similar means, absolutely necessary for all men in order to persevere in the state of grace and to save their souls, is frequent prayer to God; we are driven to it by our own great necessity; nor will God, according to the present disposition of His Providence, help us without prayer. Our necessity compels us; for who will doubt of that, who considers what we are, where we are, and what are the circumstances in which we are placed in this world? We are mortals, who, as St. Paul says, are not able of our own natural powers to form even a good thought:

“Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God.”¹ We are mortals, who, without the supernatural help and grace of God, are not only incapable of attaining eternal salvation, but cannot even make the least move towards it, or desire heaven, or tend towards it by a meritorious thought. We are poor, frail mortals, who are not only unable to do any good of ourselves, but are, moreover, inclined to evil of our own corrupt nature, and are blown hither and thither like reeds, by our inordinate appetites and desires, by pride, avarice, anger, impatience, hatred, envy, lust, forbidden love of creatures, as by so many violent winds; nay, according to the repeated assertions of the apostles, we are held captive in and by the law of sin, like bond-slaves; so that, if a man were abandoned to his own natural strength, although he is free to sin or not, yet without the supernatural assistance of God he could not, humanly speaking, long refrain from sin.

Thus miserable and frail as we are, where do we live? In the midst of a perverse world, whose vain usages and false maxims run directly counter to the divine law and the eternal truths; and yet those usages and maxims are adored as gods by most men. In the world, which is the arena wherein we have to contend by day and night with countless enemies, who far surpass us in strength and power; in the midst of a thousand temptations and dangers; dangers from the demons who surround us on all sides, and are unceasingly occupied in trying to bring about our eternal ruin; dangers from men, who lead each other into sin by bad example, by promises, threats, allurements, and flattery; dangers in prosperity, which generally turns away the human heart from God and heavenly things, and fixes it on earthly goods; dangers in adversity and in the many trials of life, which drive many a one to despair; dangers when we are alone at home; dangers when we are in company abroad. Ah, no matter where we turn, we find snares set to entrap us to eternal ruin. Well might each one of us sigh with the Prophet David: “My enemies have trodden on me all the day long; for they are many that make war against me.”² O my God, how can I, a weak mortal, save my soul from so many attacks? What can I say, but, like Josaphat, when he was surrounded by the enemy on all sides: “As for us, we have not strength enough

Always exposed to the danger of sin.

¹ Non quod sufficientes simus cogitare aliquid a nobis, quasi ex nobis: sed sufficientia nostra ex Deo est.—II. Cor. III. 5.

² Conculcaverunt me inimici mei tota die: quoniam multi bellantes adversum me.—Ps. IV. 3.

to be able to resist this multitude, which cometh violently upon us. But as we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes to thee,"¹ and humbly implore thy assistance.

God permits
these dan-
gers, that
we may al-
ways seek
help from
Him in
prayer.

And truly, my dear brethren, that is just what God requires of us men. He who wishes to be certain of a yearly income invests his capital in mortgage on immovable property. God wishes to have from His rational creatures a daily income, namely, prayer, as a sign of their service; now, what does He do in order to make sure of this? He makes sure of it by the daily miseries and wants we suffer from, and in which He alone can help us, as if He wished to say, I will give over man to continual weakness of body and soul, to darkness of the understanding, to inconstancy of the will, to continual combats and temptations, and to the manifest danger of being lost forever, so that he may know that he is in need of My help, and may humbly implore it of Me daily. St. Basil asks why God wishes us to pray to Him. For two reasons beggars are forced to ask alms from the rich and wealthy: first, to declare their poverty, of which the others could not know anything otherwise; secondly, to excite pity and commiseration by humbly representing their wants. Must we pray to God for the same reasons? No, for that all-knowing Lord is better acquainted with our wants than we are ourselves, as Christ assures us in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Your Father knoweth what is needful for you before you ask Him."² He does not require you to explain and make known to Him your miseries, for He knows them already; and, besides, He has greater pity for our wretchedness than a mother has for her only child who is sick. "I say not to you," says our dear Saviour to us by way of consolation, "that I will ask the Father for you; for the Father Himself loveth you,"³ and cares for you. Why, then, is it necessary for us to implore the help and assistance of God, if He knows already what we want, and His Fatherly love inclines Him to help us? It is true, says St. Jerome, to the heretic Vigilantius, who for those reasons maintained that prayer was unnecessary, it is true that God knows already what help and grace we are in need of from Him; and He can give us His grace without our co-operation, if He wishes

¹ In nobis quidem non est tanta fortitudo ut possimus huic multitudinī resistere, quæ irruit super nos. Sed cum ignoremus quid agere debeamus, hoc solum habemus residuū, ut oculos nostros dirigamus ad te.—II. Paralip. xx. 12.

² Scit enim Pater vester, quid opus sit vobis, antequam petatis eum.—Matt. vi. 8.

³ Non dico vobis, quia ego rogabo Patrem de vobis; ipse enim Pater amat vos.—John xvi. 26, 27.

to do so; but in the present disposition of His Providence, as a general rule, He will not give us any grace, the first alone excepted, unless we humbly ask it of Him.

If He pleased, God could have caused the fruits of the earth to come forth of themselves; but He does not do so, for He requires us to work, and till the fields and sow the seed. In the same way, as far as lies with Himself, He wishes all men to be eternally happy in heaven, and to that end He is ready to give us all the assistance of His grace in liberal measure, but on the condition that we ask it of Him; so that we may always humbly acknowledge that He is the sole Lord and Giver of all grace, on whom depends our temporal and spiritual welfare. He acts with us in this way as the Lacedæmonians did with their children; in order to make them expert archers, they never gave them a piece of bread in their hands, but set it up on high and made them shoot at it until they hit it, and then they were allowed to eat it; see, my son, they would say, there is the bread, if you wish to have it, you must shoot at it until you knock it down. See, says God, our heavenly Father, to His adopted children, there is My grace and help ready for you in superabundant measure at all times; if you wish to have it, you must shoot at it; raise your heart to Me, call out to Me, and entreat Me, and as many graces will fall down on you as you hit and ask from Me in prayer. If you are unwilling to comply with that condition, and do not even ask Me for My grace, you must suffer hunger, and ascribe the eternal loss of your soul to your own negligence.

He is ready to help us, but He must be asked.

I have told you often enough, and I tell you again, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you."¹ That is to say, he who asks nothing receives nothing; he who seeks nothing finds nothing; and if you do not knock, the door of grace will be closed against you. Therefore the Lord repeats again and again in His exhortation to turn to Him. "Cry to Me,"² He says, by the Prophet Jeremias. "Let nothing hinder thee from praying always,"³ is His warning by the Wise Ecclesiasticus. "Watch ye and pray,"⁴ are His words in the Gospel of St. Matthew; and in that of St. Luke, "We ought always to pray, and not to faint."⁵

And without prayer He will not give us His grace.

¹ Petite et dabitur vobis; quærite, et invenietis; pulsate, et aperietur vobis.—Matt. vii. 7.

² Clama ad Me.—Jerem. xxxiii. 3.

³ Non impediaris orare semper.—Eccles. xviii. 22.

⁴ Vigilate et orate.—Matt. xxvi. 41.

⁵ Oportet semper orare, et non deficere.—Luke xviii. 1.

"Pray without ceasing."¹ is His advice by the Apostle St. Paul; and by St. Peter, "Watch in prayers."² The holy Fathers, explaining the necessity of prayer, compare it to a canal, by which all gifts and graces from heaven must flow down on the human soul; to a chain, by which we draw ourselves up to God, in order to bring down His favor on ourselves; to a key, by which we open heaven, and secure the right of entry therein; to a bulwark, behind which we take refuge from all the attacks and assaults of our enemies. St. Basil says that prayer is like food, because we cannot live long without it. St. John Chrysostom compares it to air, and says that it is as necessary to us as the air we breathe, nay, as the soul is to the body. Take away from the body its food, its breath, its soul, and what would become of it? So will it be with you, if you deprive your soul of prayer. And they all, in general, maintain, that not to pray, and still to try to persevere in good; not to pray, and still to desire heaven; not to pray, and still to hope to remain free from sin, is to tempt God and to desire a miracle from Him; it is like trying to see without light, to speak without a tongue, to hear without ears, to walk without feet. "We hold it as certain," says St. Augustine, "that no one can work out his salvation without the help of God, and no one receives that help, unless he prays."³ Nay, St. John Chrysostom looks on it as a sheer impossibility. "It must be evident to all," he says, "that it is absolutely impossible to live virtuously without prayer."⁴ "Therefore," concludes St. Bernard, "I implore you, brethren, always to have prayer at hand as your most assured refuge."⁵

Neglect of
prayer oc-
casions sin
and vice.

If you notice in a religious or lay community or household that its members lead a disorderly, un-Christian and wicked life, you may conclude without any rash judgment that in that convent, or community, or family there is no spirit of prayer. But why do I speak of a community? If you see any individual who is given to vanity, drunkenness, injustice, impurity, or other vices, you may safely say, that man does not pray, or he does not pray enough. This is not my doctrine, my dear brethren; it is taken from a far more enlightened source, namely, from St.

¹ *Sine intermissione orate.*—I. Thess. v. 17.

² *Vigilate in orationibus.*—I. Pet. iv. 7.

³ *Nullum credimus salutem suam, nisi auxiliante Deo, operari; nullum, nisi orantem, auxilium promereri.*

⁴ *Arbitror cunctis esse manifestum, quod simpliciter impossibile sit absque precationis præsidio cum virtute degere.*—S. Chrysost. l. i. de orand.

⁵ *Propterea rogo vos, fratres, ut semper ad manum habeatis tutissimum orationis refugium.*

Cyprian. When that saint saw that the Christians in Africa were wandering away daily more and more from the paths of virtue, and were becoming more and more wicked, so that some of them actually denied the faith, he wrote to them: "Know that we are sleeping at our prayers, and do not pray watchfully."¹ St. John Chrysostom, speaking of the Prophet Moses praying during the battle with the Amalekites, says: "What just man has ever fought without praying? Who has ever overcome his enemy without prayer? Moses prays, and he conquers; he ceases to pray, and is conquered. From this let the Christian learn the source of his victory or defeat in the spiritual combat; although the Christian should pray more fervently" than Moses, "both because his enemy is more dangerous, and because he is fighting for himself and not for another."² What wonder, then, is it that a man who is not given to prayer is often overcome by his enemy and is led into grievous sin?

Not only is prayer necessary to us as a means of salvation, but it is often the only means which God has ordained for many; the only means for the sinner to bring him to the knowledge of his unhappy state and to true repentance and conversion; and if he does not use that means, and humbly beg of God the grace of true contrition, no other grace will ever be given him by God. It is the only means for that man who is in the midst of temptation, to enable him to resist and to conquer; and if he does not use it and cry to God for help, he will certainly consent and fall into sin. It is the only means for that oppressed individual, in order to enable him to bear his crosses and trials with patience and merit for his soul; and if he does not use it and earnestly beg of God the grace of patience, he will not be comforted by God, and will even despair. It is the only means for that just man to persevere in the state of grace; and if he does not use it, and often cry to God for help, he will be perverted and fall into sin. "The flesh being consumed, my bone hath cleaved to my skin," says Job on the dunghill; my whole body is a mass of corruption; "and nothing but lips are left about my teeth;"³ as if he wished to say, in the person of a certain sinner, through the many sins I have committed and the

Prayer is the only means by which many can lead pious lives.

¹ Sciatis quod dormitemus in precibus, nec vigilanter oremus.

² Quis justorum non orando pugnavit? Quis hostem non orando devicit? Orat Moyses, et vincit; cessat orare, et vincitur. Didicit Christianus, unde aut vincatur, aut vincat; quamvis instantius Christiano orandum sit, et quia periculosior hostis est, et quia pro seipso, non pro altero pugnat.—S. Chrysost., serm. de Moysæ.

³ Pellit meæ, consumptis carnibus, adhæst os meum. et derelicta sunt tantummodo labia circa dentes meos.—Job xix. 20.

inveterate habits of vice in which I have lived everything is in a lost and despairing condition with me; all I have left are my lips and tongue, with which I can still pray to God and implore His grace and mercy; and if I only earnestly ask for it, I shall receive it; if I do not ask for it, there is no hope of salvation for me, and I am lost forever.

It is for all a necessary means of procuring a happy death.

All the holy Fathers agree with St. Augustine in saying that prayer is absolutely necessary for all men, in order to obtain the grace of perseverance and a happy death; that grace, which, as I have said on another occasion, no man can merit by any good works, and without which all our troubles and labors go for nothing, and no man can be saved. This grace is a pure gift, as St. Augustine says, and therefore it cannot be merited; if I die in the grace of God, heaven is the reward I have merited by my good works; but if I die in the state of grace, that is a pure gift of the divine generosity, and not a reward, so that I cannot fix my hopes of salvation on any good works, as if by them I could merit that gift, but I must earnestly beg of God to bestow it on me. "It is certain," says St. Augustine, "that God has prepared some graces, such as the first grace of faith, for those who do not ask for them; and that other graces He will give only to those who pray for them, such as the grace of final perseverance."¹ "Constant prayer is necessary for a man," says St. Thomas of Aquin, "if he wishes to save his soul."² The conclusion is evident; prayer to God is an absolutely necessary means for us men to persevere in good and to attain our eternal salvation.

Hence, in the first place, no one can complain of a want of grace to love his enemy.

From all this I derive the following truths: first, that no man, no matter who he is, has just reason for complaining of a want of divine grace if he transgresses the law of God, sins grievously, dies impenitent, and is lost forever, even if God does not give him a single grace to help him to keep the commandments, to avoid sin, to do sincere penance, and to escape damnation. How so? Because the very permission that he has received to beg help and grace of God, and at the same time the infallible promise of the almighty and faithful God, "Ask and you shall receive," would force him to close his mouth, and would clearly convince him that he could have had graces and helps in abundance, if he had but asked for them; and hence, that his sins, his final im-

¹ Deum constat, alia non orantibus, ut initium fidelium, alia nonnisi orantibus præparasse, sed usque in finem perseverantiam.—S. Aug. in Exord. L. de bono perseverant.

² Necessaria est homini jugis oratio, ad hoc quod cælum introeat.

penitence, and his everlasting damnation are all to be attributed to his own negligence, his own fault. For instance, a man says, I cannot keep the commandments. Why not? I ask; show me one that you cannot keep. Christ commands me to love my enemy from my heart, to forgive him all he has ever done against me, to forget the injuries he has inflicted on me, and even to do good to him. Now, I cannot do that; it is impossible; no matter what efforts I make, I cannot drive away the recollection of the injuries that man has inflicted on me; the very sight of him makes the blood rush to my face; I cannot force myself to greet him in a friendly manner, and as to loving and doing him good, it is utterly impossible. What a terrible thing to say! Hear what St. Augustine says, or rather the Council of Trent, which quotes his words: you are mistaken, my good friend; "God does not command us to do impossible things; but when He lays His commands on us, He exhorts us to fulfil them, as far as we can, and to ask from Him help to do what is beyond our power; and then He helps us to do it."¹ There you have the proof of your mistake, or rather of your obstinacy. You do not feel any salutary inclination to forgive injuries and to love your enemy; this grace of God is wanting in you, I grant you that; without this grace you cannot possibly overcome yourself and love your enemy, that, too, I must acknowledge; but you have another grace, which is never wanting to you. And what is that? The permission to pray, which God has placed in your hands as an instrument by which you may obtain the other grace of loving your enemy, nay, every grace that is necessary and advantageous for your salvation; and you may be infallibly certain that you will receive them, for God has bound Himself and given His word to deny nothing to prayer. Therefore, if you cannot pardon and love your enemy, you can, at all events, pray. Go down on your knees, then, before a crucifix, and say: O almighty God, see this hard heart of mine! Thou commandest me to love this man, who has injured me; I would willingly do it and obey Thee, but I cannot restrain my wicked inclination. Thou hast said to me, "Ask and you shall receive," and now I beg of Thee, by that love with which Thou didst pray on the cross to Thy heavenly Father for Thy murderers and tormentors, give me Thy powerful grace and soften my heart, so that I may forget the injury done me, and love this man according to Thy law.

¹ Deus impossibilia non jubet; sed jubendo monet et facere quod possis, et petere quod non possis, et adjuvat ut possis.—Trid., Sess. vi. c. 11.

Repeat this or a similar prayer frequently and fervently, and you will get that grace as infallibly, as it is certain that God's promises cannot deceive. If you refuse to do that, then there is no help for you; but your misfortune you must attribute to yourself alone.

And to
serve God
properly,
according to
his state.

Another complains and says, ah, would that I were in a different state of life, in which I might serve God and save my soul in peace and quiet. Why do you wish that? Because I am in the midst of the turmoil of the world, in which there are every day so many dangers to be avoided, so many snares to be detected, so many temptations and allurements to be overcome. I cannot save myself from a fall; sometimes I sin here, sometimes there, so that I must despair of salvation. Nonsense! God does not command you to do impossible things; if He has called you to that state, He has not imposed any impossible task on you, no matter how dangerous it is. If it seems impossible to you to avoid sin, pray at least (for that you can always do) that it may become possible for you, and the Lord God, in virtue of His promise, will make it possible. Pray in the morning, in the evening, and in thought during the day, with king David when he was overwhelmed with the affairs of his kingdom, "O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me. Let them be confounded and ashamed that seek my soul. But I am needy and poor; O God, help me."¹ Direct my steps and teach me the way of Thy commandments; do not allow me to become puffed up by prosperity, or cast down by adversity; keep me in Thy grace, and grant that amongst the many dangers which surround me I may never forget the duties of my state, but constantly fulfil Thy holy will in all things; come to my assistance in the temptations and dangers that are inseparable from my position, that I may not consent to sin, and lose Thee, my sovereign good, etc. If you refuse to do that, there is no help for you.

And be pa-
tient in
trials.

I cannot be patient, complains a third. Why not? Because too many crosses and trials come upon me, one after the other, every day of my life. It is too much, altogether; it is intolerable; I cannot even form a good thought, anxious though I may be to do so, and much less can I resign myself to the will of God with patience; I have no consolation, either from heaven, or on

¹ Deus, in adjutorium meum intende; Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina. Confundantur et vereantur qui querunt animam meam. Ego vero egenus et pauper sum; Deus, adjuva me. - Ps. lxxix. 2, 3, 6.

earth, either from God or man; I am actually driven to despair. No, do not say that! God does not command us to do impossible things; when He told you that you must bear patiently and contentedly the crosses and trials He sends you, he did not lay on you a command impossible of fulfilment. Of course, you can be patient if you wish; and if you cannot, you can pray for that grace, at all events. Therefore, if that despairing feeling comes on you, sigh and cry out to God, although you may not have any relish in such prayers, O dearest Saviour, who didst have mercy on those poor people who were hungry and had nothing to eat, grant me patience, that I may bear for Thy sake the heavy cross Thy Fatherly hands have laid on my shoulders, and enable me to resign my obstinate will to Thine. I ask this of Thee, O Lord, by the merits of that prayer Thou didst send forth to Thy heavenly Father when in Thy agony in the Garden. "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."¹ Patience, O Lord! etc. If you do not cease praying, I assure you, in the name of God, who has promised to deny nothing to fervent prayer, that you will experience spiritual comfort and consolation in your crosses, no matter how heavy they may be. If you refuse to do that, you may despair if you will; I cannot help you; but do not blame the almighty God for your despair.

I cannot keep from certain sins, says a fourth. Why not? The bad habit of this or that vice has now grown inveterate with me; I cannot withstand the temptations and assaults that are made on me day and night; they are so violent and impetuous, that I cannot resist them, and must succumb. What do you mean by that? Does not St. Paul say expressly, that "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it"?² And you, too, can withstand your wicked desires, or any other temptations, no matter how violent they are. If you have not the grace to do so, then, at all events, you can pray for it. The holy Abbot Sabas, as Metaphrastes writes in his Life, had retired into a cave, in order to serve God better. Once during the night, as he was asleep, a lion came in, took the holy man by the clothes and began violent-

And overcome temptations.

¹ Pater mi, si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste: verumtamen, non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu.—Matt. xxvi. 39.

² Fidelis autem Deus est, qui non patietur vos tentari supra id quod potestis; sed faciet etiam cum tentatione preventum ut possitis sustinere.—I. Cor. x. 13.

ly to drag him out. When Sabas awoke, he at once betook himself to prayer, and the lion stood still without doing him further harm. But when the prayer was finished, the savage beast renewed his former violence. The Saint took refuge again in prayer, and the lion again became quiet. And at the next interruption of the prayer, the lion renewed his attacks. Thus it went on for some time, until at last the holy man, full of confidence in God, and with a holy indignation, turned to the lion and said: I will not go out; but you must go at once. Whereupon the lion left him. Do you know what St. Peter says? "Be sober and watch, because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour."¹ This hellish lion rushes at you when you are tempted to sin; but, in order to be able to devour you, he tries to drag you first out of the cave of decency, mildness, meekness, justice, chastity, and perhaps you feel that you are inwardly inclined to anger and impatience, to cursing and swearing, to avarice and injustice, to impurity and unchaste love, and that you are, as it were, violently impelled in the direction of those passions. If you wish the fierce lion to be quiet, or lose his strength, and to frustrate his efforts, you have no other means but to fly to God for refuge by prayer. "Watch ye and pray that ye enter not into temptation,"² is the exhortation given by Our Lord to all of us. St. Ambrose assures you that the devil with his temptations is put to flight by prayer; "where there is prayer," he says, "the Word is present, cupidity is banished, lust disappears."³ And St. Isidor maintains that the proper means by which to extinguish the fire of the passions is to pray whenever it is enkindled in the heart: "This is the means for him to adopt who is on fire with the assaults of vice; for, as often as he feels the attacks of passion, if he pours out prayer, he will find that it will extinguish the fire of temptation."⁴ Pray, then, you, too, when you are tempted. But if you refuse to do that, and do not appeal to God to help you, then you must not be surprised at your weakness and frailty, but you ought not to complain that you cannot overcome temptation. "No one can be excused," say St. John Chrysostom,

¹ Sobrii estote, et vigilate; quia adversarius vester, diabolus, tanquam leo rugiens circuit quærens quem devoret.—I. Pet. v. 8.

² Vigilate et orate, ut non intretis in tentationem.—Matt. xxvi. 41.

³ Ubi est oratio, adest Verbum, fugatur cupiditas, libido discedit.—S. Ambr. de Viduis.

⁴ Hoc est medium ejus, qui vitiorum tentamentis æstuat, ut quoties vitio quolibet tangitur, toties orationem fundat; quia frequens oratio impugnationem vitiorum extinguit.—S. Isidor., de Summo Bono, l. iii., c. 8.

“who by ceasing to pray shows that he does not wish to conquer the enemy.”¹

Hear what Father Paul Segneri writes of a young man named Pacco. This young man retired into the desert, in order to do penance for his sins. After having spent many years there in the practice of the greatest austerities, he was assailed by such violent temptations to impurity that he could not overcome them, and often gave way to them, until at last he was driven to despair, and made up his mind to put an end to himself. It is better, he thought, to die at once, and go to hell, than to live longer and commit more sin, thus adding to my eternal torments. Filled with this idea, he ran to a cave in which he knew that there were two fierce, wild animals, that they might kill him. As he entered, the beasts sprang at him; but they had hardly touched him, when they crouched down at his feet, meek as dogs. The hermit, encouraged by this miracle, returned home, full of comfort. But the temptations came back to him; and again falling into despair, he caught up with both hands a poisonous adder that was crawling about on the sand; he scratched the reptile and tried to provoke it in every possible way to bite him, but all in vain; the adder would not touch him. O my God, he cried out at last, Thou allowest so many men to die, who fear nothing more than death, while I, poor wretch, would willingly die, and Thou wilt not permit me. And then he heard a voice calling to him: poor mortal! how can you imagine that you will be able by your own strength to overcome temptations? “Pray to God; ask God to help you!”² Place your confidence in Him, and the temptations will not harm you. And after he had prayed fervently he experienced immediate relief, so that ever after he would not have feared all the demons of hell. Now we might ask, could not the good God have come sooner to the assistance of that poor hermit, who was so good and well-meaning at first? Certainly, there is no doubt of that; and yet He did not do so; He preferred to work all those miracles, rather than to help by His grace one who had not asked for it, thus showing that without prayer we cannot hope for anything from Him, while by prayer we can obtain everything. Therefore no one can have just reason for com-

Advantage and necessity of prayer in all those cases shown by an example.

¹ Nec quisquam poterit excusari, qui hostem vincere noluit, dum ab orando cessavit.—S. Joan. Chrysost. de Moyse.

² Deum roga; Deum precare!

plaining that he had not the grace, that he has fallen into sin, and that he is lost forever.

Even heretics can obtain the light of faith by prayer.

In the fifth place, heretics, who are not in the true Catholic faith, in which alone salvation can be found, and especially those who now and then have a reasonable doubt as to the religion they profess, or who at least could have such a doubt, may allege by way of excuse that God did not give them the gift and light of the true faith. I grant that they have not received that gift; but they could have asked God for it, and if they had done so they would certainly have received it. If I knew that there were any such here, I would cry out to them: precious, dear souls, you, too, are bought by the Blood of Jesus Christ, you are created for heaven, as well as I and all men; and I would willingly do all in my power to bring you to heaven; but you must know (and indeed you believe it) that no one can be saved outside the true faith. “But he that believeth not, shall be condemned.”¹ Reason teaches you, too, that there can be but one true faith; for the God of truth cannot say yes and no to the same article of belief. For instance, it cannot be true at the same time, that, as we Catholics believe, Jesus Christ has instituted seven sacraments, and, according to your teaching in different countries, that He has instituted only two, or three, or four, or five; otherwise God would be guilty of deceiving either you or us, and that is impossible; therefore, either your religion or ours must necessarily be false. But I do not wish to dispute with you now as to the truth of our respective religions. One request only I make of you, and your religion will not cause you to object to it: pray and call out to God: my Lord and my God, Thou hast created me for eternal happiness; my only wish and desire is to come to Thee in heaven, otherwise it were better for me that I never were born! Now I beg of Thee, by the precious Blood that Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Saviour, shed for me, lead me on the way in which Thou knowest I shall save my soul; if I am on the right way already, then keep me on it; but if I am wrong, if my religion is not the true one, then I implore of Thee to bring me to the true religion, in which I can save my soul! You can pray in that manner without doing the least wrong to your religion, especially if a doubt occurs to you now and then; and that prayer is a reasonable one, as you must acknowledge. I beg of you, for the sake of your soul’s salvation, repeat it daily with humility and fervor, and you will certainly receive what

¹ Qui vero non crediderit, condemnabitur.—Mark xvi. 16.

you ask for. I have no doubts about my religion, you say. Very well; but even in that case that prayer cannot harm you; for, if you are on the right way, it will help to keep you there; and if not, it will help to set you right. Ask, then, and you shall receive.

Another truth which follows from the foregoing is this: the state of the man who gives up prayer, or who calls on God for help only seldom or in a sleepy fashion, is a most miserable and desperate one. Why? Because to give up prayer means to neglect the most necessary means of salvation, which cannot be replaced by any other. All other means, good and meritorious works, and even the holy sacraments themselves, necessary and useful as they always are to our souls, can be supplied in some other way, when there is no opportunity of having recourse to them. If I cannot fast on account of ill health, I can make up for it by alms-giving or other good works; if I have no opportunity of confessing my sins, I can obtain forgiveness for them by an act of perfect contrition; even if I have not an opportunity of receiving baptism, I can make up for it by my desire and by a perfect love of God. But nothing can take the place of prayer; if I refuse to pray, I have nothing on which to ground, with any degree of certainty, my hopes of salvation; for without prayer, in the present disposition of God's Providence, as we have seen already, God does not, as a general rule, bestow His graces; without prayer I shall not receive the grace of repenting of and detesting my sins, nor the grace of loving God above all things, nor the grace of final perseverance and a happy death, without which I cannot hope to save my soul. A sinner, no matter how wicked he is, as long as he prays for the grace of conversion and amendment, has not yet lost all hope; but if he goes so far as to lose the spirit of prayer, or not to have an earnest desire that his prayers should be heard, then one might say of him with truth, that man is blinded, hardened, and obstinate in sin. Therefore the penitent David praises and blesses God with a grateful heart: "Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me,"¹ and who, after all the sins I have committed, has left me still the love of prayer!

Therefore, Christians, whatever we do, let us pray! Whatever good works we neglect, let us not give up prayer. A certain doctor, who was very successful in the treatment of his patients,

It follows, too, that he is in a desperate state who does not pray.

Exhortation to constant and fervent prayer.

¹ Benedictus Deus, qui non amovit orationem meam, et misericordiam suam a me. — Ps. lxv. 26.

before feeling the pulse of a sick person, used to remain silent for a while, and seem to be lost in thought; he would then feel the pulse, and again resume his cogitations. As he was in the habit of acting in that way even in cases that were not serious, a good friend of his asked him one day what was the meaning of it. He answered that, before feeling the pulse of his patient, he was in the habit of praying to God that he might diagnose the case correctly, and afterwards he prayed that he might use the proper remedies; for the science of medicine is a difficult one, and nothing is easier than to make a mistake in examining a sick person, so that he knew of nothing better than to recommend himself to God in his professional difficulties. Oh, if all had recourse to the same means in the far more dangerous illnesses and maladies of the soul, how easy the business of their salvation would become! "Ask and you shall receive." Sinners, who are still suffering from spiritual maladies, ah! pray, and pray daily, Lord, give me grace to know the dangerous illness from which I am suffering, and to use the right means of freeing myself from it, that I may at last be converted to Thee with my whole heart! Proud, avaricious, envious, passionate, vindictive, impure, intemperate, and tepid Christians! ask, ask without ceasing, Lord, make me humble, meek, pure, and zealous in Thy service! Pious Christians, ask, and ask fervently, O Lord, make me love Thee constantly! keep me from all occasions of sin! help me with Thy powerful grace in the dangers and temptations I cannot avoid, that I may not consent to them, and lose Thy friendship! In temporal prosperity, ask, pray to God, Lord, free my heart from an inordinate love of temporal goods, that I may not lose eternal happiness! In crosses and trials, ask, pray to God, Lord, give me the grace of patience, that my will may always be united with Thine! If you sometimes, through trouble and annoyance, have no taste for prayer, or do not know how to pray, then say at least: Lord, give me the desire for prayer! grant me the grace to pray as I ought!

**Conclusion
and resolution.**

Yes, O my God, I shall do that! Happy me! even if I had received no other benefit from Thee but that alone of being allowed to pray to Thee at all times, in all places, in all circumstances, not only with the lips, but also with my thoughts! And at the same time Thou hast given me the assurance that in matters that concern my eternal salvation Thou wilt always hear my prayer. Do I not owe Thee a debt of infinite gratitude? Oh, if all the beggars in the world were certain of

getting whatever they ask for, who could look on himself as poor and needy? This very certainty Thou hast given me, O God; and shall I, then, neglect to profit by it? No; the misery and poverty of my soul is, as I must acknowledge, too great for me to neglect appealing to Thee, who alone canst help me. Therefore I will pray, and pray humbly and constantly; and since I am in need of Thy help and grace every day, hour, and moment of my life, I will every day humbly entreat Thee to assist me; nay, according to Thy advice to pray always, and not to cease praying, I will offer up to Thee everything I do, raising my mind to Thee and directing all my actions to Thy honor and glory, and I will sigh forth to Thee, with Thy prophet: "O God, be not Thou far from me; O my God, make haste to my help." When my soul is in danger of offending Thee, "be not Thou far from me!" "make haste to my help," and do not abandon me! When, at the end of my life, my soul shall be on the point of leaving the body, ah, Lord, that is the time for Thee to show Thy mercy, and to give me the last grace of final perseverance, which Thou hast promised to those who pray! Then, "be not Thou far from me; make haste to my help." I rely on Thee; Thou canst not be unfaithful to Thy word. Thou hast said, "ask and you shall receive." I will ask, and will humbly and with child-like confidence persevere in asking; and thus I shall certainly receive Thy help in life, Thy grace in death, and Thy glory, which Thou hast promised to give me in eternity, where I shall praise, love, and adore Thee forever. Amen.

On False and Useless Prayer, see the foregoing Second Part. On the Properties and Effects of Prayer, see the following Fourth Part.

FIFTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON KEEPING ONE'S SELF IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD, IN
ORDER TO AVOID SIN.

Subject.

The best and surest means of avoiding all sin is the constant recollection of the presence of God.—*Preached on Pentecost Sunday.*

¹ Deus, ne elongeris a me; Deus meus, in auxilium meum respice.—Ps. lxx. 12.

Text.

Ad eum veniemus, et mansionem apud eum faciemus.—JOHN xiv. 23.

“We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him.”

Introduction.

So that the great God, who is all-sufficient to Himself, loves so much a poor mortal who loves Him, that, not satisfied with heaven and earth, He wishes to dwell in that man personally with His whole divine essence. “If any man love Me,” He says, “he will keep My word, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him,” that is, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost will take up Their dwelling in him. Just souls, children of God, rejoice and exult, as long as you are in the state of sanctifying grace, on account of this great honor that is yours! And be most careful never to lose by mortal sin the great God who is dwelling in and with you. To avoid that misfortune, you must keep up a constant communication with God by always walking in His presence. Nor can you find any better means of keeping free from sin, as I shall now prove.

Plan of Discourse.

The best and surest means of avoiding all sin is the constant recollection of the presence of God; therefore he who wishes to be free from sin, and to have his God dwelling in him, must always think to himself: God is with me. Such is the whole subject.

We beg Thy light and grace, O Holy Ghost! through the intercession of Mary and the holy guardian angels.

The rope-dancer must keep his eyes fixed on one point if he does not wish to fall.

There is many a simple soul who, if he saw a rope-dancer performing his tricks, would certainly come to the conclusion that such feats are impossible without the aid of witchcraft or sorcery; for what wonderful things does not the rope-dancer do on the slender rope suspended high in the air? He dances and leaps about with the weight of his whole body, bending backwards and forwards, as confidently as if he were on the ground; he makes somersaults in the air and alights on his feet; he hangs on the rope by an arm or a leg, and in a moment is on his feet again. Nay, sometimes he wheels a barrow over the rope, and rarely does he get a fall. How is that possible? No, no, says the simple peasant; you may say what you will, I do not like the business, God has little part in it, that man has surely deal

ings with the devil. And yet the whole thing is natural enough, and requires only a certain bodily dexterity and agility, which can be acquired by practice. But how does the rope-dancer keep himself from falling? He has a long pole in his hands, with equal weights at either end, that helps him to keep his balance. But that is not all; the chief thing consists in the man himself. If you look attentively at him, you will see that he keeps his eyes fixed on a ring or globe, beside which there is a lighted candle; that is the point at which he must look constantly, in order not to lose his balance. During the performance you will never see him turning his eyes away from that, and even if he turns his face a little to one side now and then, his eyes will still be fixed on that central point. If he were to turn away from it, and begin to stare around him, neither his skill nor the balancing pole would be of the least assistance to him; he would certainly lose his balance, fall, and break his neck.

My dear brethren, Cassian and St. John Chrysostom compare a rope-dancer each and every one who wishes to keep straight on the way of virtue, that leads to heaven. While we are in this world, we are exposed to far more and far greater dangers than the rope-dancer, and if we fall, it is not so much the mortal body as the immortal soul that suffers; wherever we go, we are walking in the midst of snares and traps that are set for our eternal ruin at all times, in all places; for so the Prophet David calls the dangers and occasions of sin: "The cords of the wicked have encompassed me."¹ "The proud have hid a net for me: and they have stretched out cords for a snare: they have laid for me a stumbling block by the way-side."² Oh, how deplorable the fall of some who were at first most holy, just, and pious servants of God; who seemed to have made a spring from those ropes even to heaven; who shone in virtue and sanctity like the stars of the firmament, and who yet fell headlong down from the way of the divine law into the depths of mortal sin! How shameful the fall of David himself, although he had ascended even to the heart of God, for one incautious glance was enough to turn him away from God, and to make him an adulterer and a murderer! How disgraceful the fall of Solomon, his son, the wisest man that ever lived! In spite of his wisdom, he allowed himself to be ensnared by carnal love; he forgot his God and bent the

Like rope-dancers, we are in constant danger of falling into sin.

¹ Funes peccatorum circumplexi sunt me.—Ps. cxviii. 61.

² Absconderunt superbi laqueum mihi, et funes extenderunt in laqueum: juxta iter scandalum posuerunt mihi.—Ibid. cxxxix. 6.

knee before dumb idols. How terrible the fall of Judas, an apostle of Jesus Christ, who, after he had become blinded by the love of money, was changed into a despairing demon, as Christ had foretold of him! With reason does St. Paul cry out to us all: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."¹ He who has a good conscience should be careful not to fall into sin.

• Therefore our eyes should be always kept fixed on the presence of God.

What are we to do, my dear brethren, what means must we make use of, to keep our balance and to avoid the danger of a fall? The rope-dancer, as we have seen, holds a pole in his hand, with which he moves about fearlessly. Our pole must be the fear and love of God, which should keep us from sin and in the way of virtue by the twofold weight of the promise of heaven and the threat of hell. But how long will this pole help us, if we do not remember it, and think of Him who promises the reward and threatens the punishment? The chief, best, and surest means of never committing a mortal sin is to be found in our eyes, minds, and memories, which we must always keep fixed on the central point, that is, on God. We must always keep God before our eyes, and walk in His presence as well as we can by our thoughts. "As for the just," says David, "they shall give glory to Thy name; and the upright shall dwell with Thy countenance."² "They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance," as in that of a lighted candle, "and in Thy name they shall rejoice all the day."³ "My eyes are ever towards the Lord," he says of himself before his fall, "for he shall pluck my feet out of the snare,"⁴ and will keep me from falling. His wise son gives us the same warning in the Book of Proverbs: "Have confidence in the Lord with all thy heart; in all thy ways think on Him, and He will direct thy steps: then shalt thou walk confidently in thy way, and thy foot shall not stumble: for the Lord will be at thy side, and will keep thy foot, that thou be not taken."⁵ Oh, if David and Solomon had themselves acted according to this beautiful advice, they would not have fallen so shamefully into sin!

¹ Qui se existimat stare, videat ne cadat.—I. Cor. x. 12.

² Justi confitebuntur nomini tuo, et habitabunt recti cum vultu tuo.—Ps. cxxxix. 14.

³ Domine, in lumine vultus tui ambulabunt, et in nomine tuo exultabunt tota die.—Ibid. lxxxviii. 16, 17.

⁴ Oculi mei semper ad Dominum; quoniam ipse evellet de laqueo pedes meos.—Ibid. xxiv. 15.

⁵ Habe fiduciam in Domino ex toto corde tuo; in omnibus viis tuis cogita illum, et ipse diriget gressus tuos: tunc ambulabis fiducialiter in via tua, et pes tuus non impinget. Dominus enim erit in latere tuo, et custodiet pedem tuum, ne capiaris.—Prov. iii. 5, 6, 23, 26.

And whence does it come that so many miserable falls occur in the world, and that sin, alas! is committed so frequently without scruple or shame, daily and hourly, for some wretched thing, by people of all kinds, young and old, great and lowly, if not from the fact that they turn away the eyes of the mind from the central point, forgetting the great God, who is always present, and is looking at them? "They have set their eyes bowing down to the earth," says David of the wicked: "so as not to think of God. "God is not before his eyes,"¹ that is, the eyes of the sinner. And what is the consequence? "His ways are filthy at all times: Thy judgments are removed from his sight."² According to another interpretation the passage reads: "His ways bring forth."³ The Holy Ghost means thereby that, just as those parts of the earth's surface which are never lit by the rays of the sun can produce nothing but serpents and reptiles, and other poisonous creatures, so, too, in the heart of one who hides from the face of God and rejects the light of a real lively faith in the divine presence nothing can be produced but monstrosities of vice: "His ways bring forth." "His mouth is full of cursing," continues the Psalmist, "and of bitterness, and of deceit;"⁴ his hands are full of injustice; his house is like a den of lions, in which he lies in wait for the innocent and poor, that he may oppress them, etc., and all this, because "God is not before his eyes:" "For he hath said in his heart: God hath forgotten, He hath turned away His face not to see the end."⁵ Behold, said God to His Prophet Ezechiel: "The iniquity of the house of Israel and of Juda is exceeding great, and the land is filled with blood, and the city is filled with perverseness."⁶ And the whole cause and origin of this wickedness was that, "they have said, The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not."⁷ They thought so little of God, that they almost believed He was no longer amongst them.

Experience teaches us that the same is the case nowadays with each and every sinner. When people have made up their

Most sins are caused by forgetting God.

He who sins drives

¹ Oculos suos statuerunt declinare in terram.—Ps. xvi. 11.

² Non est Deus in conspectu ejus.—Ibid. ix. 5.

³ Iniquitatis sunt viæ illius in omni tempore. Auferentur judicia tua a facie ejus.—Ibid.

⁴ Parturiunt viæ illius.

⁵ Cujus maledictione os plenum est, et amaritudine, et dolo.—Ibid. 7.

⁶ Dixit enim in corde suo: oblitus est Deus, avertit faciem suam, ne videat in finem.—Ibid. 11.

⁷ Iniquitas domus Israel et Juda magna est nimis valde, et repleta est terra sanguinibus, et civitas repleta est aversione.—Ezech. ix. 9.

⁸ Dixerunt enim: dereliquit Dominus terram, et Dominus non videt.—Ibid.

God out of
his memory.

minds to commit sin, they do not think of the all-seeing God, nor do they wish to think of Him; they are afraid of hearing anything about Him which might make them uneasy and disturb their wicked projects. For, as St. Ambrose says, nothing is more intolerable to them than that the all-seeing eye of God should witness their vices. They would be glad if God could not see or notice anything, so that they might give a loose rein to their disorderly desires without being discovered. They act, in a word, like the two elders who attacked the chaste Susanna with their impure proposals. "They perverted their own mind," says the Holy Scripture of them, "and turned away their eyes, that they might not look unto heaven, nor remember just judgments." What wonder is it, then, that God should withdraw His fatherly hand from such men, allow them to run into danger, and to fall into many sins and be lost forever? "My people heard not My voice," He says by the Psalmist, "and Israel hearkened not to Me; so I let them go (terrible words!) according to the desires of their heart; they shall walk in their own inventions;"¹ like dumb beasts, they will go wherever their untamed desires shall draw them. Mark, my dear brethren, the origin of all sins and vices is to turn away the eyes from God, to forget His presence.

No subject
would act
unbecom-
ingly in the
presence of
his king.

On the other hand, how could it be possible for a man, no matter how strong his desires to evil, how violent the temptations that assail him, to sin grievously when he keeps the presence of God, who sees everything he does and is everywhere present, before his eyes with a lively faith? According to His own promise, the Lord cannot deprive of His help the man who with child-like confidence always keeps his eyes fixed on Him; nor can any man who has the least sense of decency left be so presumptuous and shameless as to dare to offend God at the very moment when he recollects with a lively faith that God is there looking at him. Oh, what modesty and reverence is caused amongst his attendants by the mere presence of a prince or king! "The king, that sitteth on the throne of judgment," says the Wise Man, "scattereth away all evil with his look."² Could one of his servants be so daring and insolent as to act the buffoon before him, speak slightly of him, or draw his sword against him?

¹ Everterunt sensum suum, et declinaverunt oculos suos, ut non viderent cœlum, neque recordarentur iudiciorum justorum.—Dan. xiii. 9.

² Non audivit populus meus vocem meam, et Israel non intendit mihi; et dimisi eos secundum desideria cordis eorum; ibunt in adinventionibus suis.—Ps. lxxx. 12, 13.

³ Rex, qui sedet in solio iudicii, dissipat omne malum intuitu suo.—Prov. xx. 8.

It is not an unheard-of thing in the world, nor is it to be wondered at, that there should be rebellious subjects, who revolt against their lawful sovereign and plot in secret against him, when they are at a distance from him; but that one should publicly venture into the palace in which his sovereign lives, penetrate into his room, draw his sword, and say that he does not acknowledge him for his lawful king, that would be an act of daring such as has never been heard of up to the present, and which could only be expected of a madman. King Antigonus, as he was once concealed in his tent, heard some of his ministers, who were standing before it, murmur against him, whereupon he put his head outside the tent and said to them: "go a little further off, lest the king should hear you;"¹ and the ministers were as much shocked and frightened as if they had been smitten with a thunderbolt. No soldier would be so insolent and daring as to treat with contempt his general or superior officer in the midst of his army. In olden times a soldier once ventured on an act of that kind; persuaded by his companions, he went to a certain place where Marius, the celebrated general, was, with the intention of killing him; but no sooner had he looked at him, when he lost the power of moving even his hand, not to speak of drawing his sword, so that the mere presence of his superior prevented him from committing the intended murder.

Where is the child so ill-reared and unnatural as to act insultingly to his father, who loves him dearly and has never done anything to harm him? Alas, on second thoughts, I must recall my words! for are there not wicked children who, when they are grown up, treat their aged and feeble parents as if they were servants, nay, even dare to threaten and beat them? Yet this is a rare thing in the world, and such children are looked on by all respectable people who hear of their bad conduct as monsters, who, as the Holy Scripture says of wicked children, deserve to have their eyes devoured by the ravens. Absalom was one of these undutiful children, who dared to take up arms against his own father; but he did it out of his father's sight; for, as we read in the Second Book of Kings, after having murdered his brother, he was forbidden to appear in his father's presence; he "saw not the king's face,"² which would doubtless have inspired him with fear and reverence. The prodigal son we read of in the Gospel dissipated all his substance in riotous living and

Nor a child
in the pres-
ence of its
parents.

¹ Recedite parum, ne rex vos audiat.

² Faciem regis non vidit. — II. Kings xiv. 24.

impurity; but while he was leading that wicked life he was out of his father's sight; "he went abroad into a far country, and there wasted his substance living riotously."¹ And yet the greatest cause of sorrow to him afterwards was that his father, even at a distance, knew all his bad conduct; therefore he wept bitterly and cried out: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee," as it were in thy very sight and hearing; "I am not worthy to be called thy son."²

Nor a wife
in the pres-
ence of her
husband.

She would be, indeed, an unworthy and shameless woman, who would dare in the presence of her husband to act too freely with a stranger. How enraged king Assuerus was, as we read in the Book of Esther, when he came in out of the garden and found Aman kneeling at the feet of the queen, although the only intention of that unhappy courtier was to ask the queen to intercede for him; but Assuerus, suspecting that he was guilty, cried out to him, full of wrath: "He will force the queen also, in my presence, in my own house."³ What an intolerable insult! Away with the wretch, to the gibbet at once! "The word was not yet gone out of the king's mouth, and immediately they covered his face."⁴ "In my presence!" 'This it was that made the bare suspicion intolerable to Assuerus. No servant, says St. Augustine, would dare to bring anything away out of the house when the master or mistress is standing at the door looking on: nor would he even venture to pluck a flower in the garden, or to pick up an apple that had fallen from a tree, and eat it, or to hide away a crust of bread, unless he was sure that the master or mistress could not see him.

Every one
is ashamed
to do a dis-
graceful act
before an-
other.

But why should we spend such a long time speaking of the presence of a master, a parent, or a king? For every one has at least that much natural modesty, that he would abstain from doing a disgraceful action in the presence of another, although the latter may be nothing to him, and may not have any power either to benefit or to injure him. If you, O unchaste man, when, shut up in your room, you are meditating a shameful action, knew that even a beggar, a child, or a lowly swineherd were at the door, looking through the key-hole, although you could not see him, yet if there is any spark of shame left in you,

¹ Peregre profectus est in regionem longinquam. et ibi dissipavit substantiam suam vivendo luxuriose.—Luke xv. 13.

² Pater, peccavi in cælum et coram te; jam non sum dignus vocari filius tuus.—Ibid. 18, 19.

³ Etiam reginam vult opprimere, me præsentem, in domo mea.—Esth. vii. 8.

⁴ Necdum verbum de ore regis exierat, et statim operuerunt faciem ejus.—Ibid.

you would desist from the sinful act. Ah, what fear and torment it causes many a one to declare under strict secrecy and in private, to one whom he may not know and who does not know him, his secret sins! What would it be if that other person were actually present and had seen the sin committed? And how many souls are brought to eternal ruin by that hellish shame; for they prefer to carry the load of their secret sins about with them for years and years, making during the time bad confessions and Communions, sacrificing God and their hopes for eternity, and giving themselves up to the flames of hell, rather than declare candidly one such sin to their confessor! Such power is exercised over them by the listening ears of another, to say nothing of the witnessing eyes of one who is present. And what is still more, the very presence of a senseless statue representing a great prince, has, as St. John Chrysostom testifies, often kept a rebellious people in subjection. Nay, if the Evil One himself were present in visible form, who would dare to commit a sin, although the foul spirit would be pleased at such an act? I do not think any one would be so hardy, for he would be terrified at the fearful aspect of the tempter, and would abstain from sin, unless he has formally devoted himself to the service of the devil.

Why have I spoken in such detail of these matters, my dear brethren? That you may see all the clearer the wickedness and presumption of the sinner who sins in the presence, before the very eyes, of his God. Represent to yourselves, if you can, at once all that I have said, and then say whether you think it possible for one who remembers with a lively faith that God is present and sees all his actions to commit a mortal sin? If the presence of a prince, a master, a father, a husband, a beggar, a child, a devil, nay, even the very dread of being found out or seen, is enough to keep unruly desires in check, how much more capable of doing that is not the true, undoubted, and living presence of God, who is our lord and king, compared with whom all the monarchs of the earth are but as grains of sand? That God who is our true and loving father, who has bound us to Himself with a million benefits as with so many chains, and has laid us under an eternal obligation never to offend Him! That God who is the jealous Spouse of our souls, and who wishes that we should devote our hearts to His love alone, to whom we have sworn eternal fidelity in baptism! The man whose presence I dread can notice nothing but what appears outwardly,

Much more
should the
remem-
brance of
the presence
of God deter
us from
sin.

when I commit a sin; but God sees and penetrates, besides the outward act, even my most secret and hidden thoughts and desires: He searches the reins and the heart. The man who is the witness of my guilt is nothing to me; I have nothing to fear from him, except that I must be ashamed before him; but the God who sees me sin is my just and strict judge, before whom the angels prostrate themselves in fear, and all nature trembles; who pursues every sin with implacable hatred, forbids it so strictly, and punishes it so terribly; who, after the first sin I commit, can cast me down, body and soul, into hell, amongst the demons. If, I say, a man realizes to himself that this great God hears and sees him, that He is before, and behind, and on both sides of him; if he can say to himself, God is in me, and I am in Him, and now I, a poor worm of the earth, am about to rebel against this great God, to trample His law under foot, and to do what is displeasing to Him! Where will I do it? Before His face, under His very eye, in His arms in which He holds me, in His lap in which I rest! Should not that thought act as a powerful check on my bad desires, and keep me from sin? If not, then what will be able to do it?

Shown by
an example.

A nobleman of high rank, who was an officer in the German army, as he was once giving a candid account of the state of his conscience to a priest of our Society, told him that he had never offended God by a mortal sin. Being asked how he was so fortunate as to keep his soul free from grievous sin, in the midst of the many and great dangers which surround the soldier's life, he answered that when he was at school, in one of our colleges at Parma, the words, "God sees me," made such a deep impression on his memory that he could never forget them. He acknowledged that he was often grievously tempted to hatred, revenge, rapine, and impurity, but he always came off victorious with the help of the thought, "God sees me." During the temptation he would say to himself, if his imperial majesty were here now and looking at me, I certainly would not consent to my wicked desires in his presence; shall I, then, give way to them before the infinite Majesty of the omnipresent, all-seeing God? Oh, no; I will not, I cannot do that! And with that thought he kept himself free from all grievous sin. He added, moreover, that in his engagements with the enemy the same thought was a wonderful source of courage to him; for he used to say to himself, the almighty God is here, He sees the danger into which I am forced to go by my duty, He sees the necessity in which I am, and He can and

will help me to come out of it unscathed. Oh, if all men, when they are tempted, took refuge in a similar thought, would it be possible, I ask again, for them to consent to mortal sin so easily?

To remember that God is present, and yet to sin! Oh, who will give me words to express the exceeding great presumption of such an act! It would be the same as sinning and taking God to witness that we have sinned; nay, it would be, so to speak, making God hold the light for us, that He might see how we despise and condemn Him. What more terrible thing could one think of? To my mind, it is like the act of a tyrant who shows the father and mother the knives and other instruments with which he is about to have their little son hacked to pieces; or like that of the thieves who compel the master of the house they have broken into to hold the candle for them, while they are rifling his coffers. To realize that God is present, and yet to sin! That is nothing else than mocking God in thought and action, which He understands just as well as words, and saying to Him, see, my God, although I know that Thou art here, and seest me; although I know that this impure thought in which I am now taking a wilful pleasure, this improper conversation I am commencing, this shameful act I am doing, is very displeasing to Thee; although I am aware that Thou hast me completely in Thy power, and canst punish me as Thou pleasest, yet I will accomplish my wickedness under Thy very eyes, and before Thy face. Thou shalt be my witness and helper in my sin; what Thou hast promised or threatened is nothing to me; Thou mayest be angry or not, it makes no difference; I will gratify my passions and enjoy the pleasures Thou hast forbidden. You who have any sense of decency, stop your ears, lest you should hear such insolence! And yet, O sinner, you and I are guilty of it, as well as every one who consents to mortal sin; for sin is committed before the eye of the all-seeing God. But what lessens in some degree our malice is the fact that, when we sin, we do not remember in such a lively manner the presence of God. No, my dear brethren, it must be that we do not think of it, or else we could not sin. "The recollection of the presence of God," says St. Jerome, "puts a stop to all vice."

From this we can see how great the audacity of one who sins, remembering that God is present.

Hence St. Basil says straight out that we do not consent to sin until we have first shut the eyes of the mind to the thought of the presence of God; and that each sin that we commit is a proof

Folly of the sinner who tries to forget God, al-

¹ *Memoria Dei cuncta excludit flagitia.*

though God
sees him all
the time.

that we have not a lively faith that God sees us. True, our conscience cries out, God is looking at you; but we close the ears of our mind, as it were, to its warning voice, when we wish to commit sin; we allow our thoughts to be distracted by things that flatter our sensuality, we drive God out of our hearts, and act like little children, who cover their eyes with their hands, and then think they are not seen. But we may close our eyes and keep God out of our thoughts as long as we please, He is still present and sees us, whether we like it or not. If, like the heathens of old, we had a god of wood or stone, made by hands, we could hide from him. And, as St. Cyril relates, there were some who made the sun their god, so that during the night, when he was asleep, they might sin without scruple, as he could not see them. If we had a god of that kind, O Christians, I could understand in a measure why so many Catholics commit such abominations during the night; but the God we adore is far different; His eyes are infinitely brighter than the sun; they are not darkened by the darkest night; everything is bare and open before Him, as the Apostle says to the Hebrews: "Neither is there any creature invisible in His sight; but all things are naked and open to His eyes." ¹

And no one
can hide
from Him.

In vain did our forefather Adam, after his fall, try to hide from the sight of God. Adam, cried the Lord to him, where art thou? I can see thee plainly, and saw thee while thou wert eating the forbidden fruit. "He did not hide from God," says St. Gregory, "but hid God from himself." ² In vain did Cain, after the murder of his brother, try to escape the sight of the Lord; in vain did Jonas fly before His face: "Jonas rose up to flee into Tharsis from the face of the Lord." ³ He soon found out that the Lord saw him wherever he went. He ventured out on the high seas, and there he saw the presence of God in the storm that rose against him; he allowed himself to be cast into the deep, and there he found God present when the huge fish came to swallow him up; he was hidden in the belly of the monster, and found God present there, for he acknowledges himself that it was God who saved his life; when the fish cast him out on the shore, and he went to Ninive, there, too, he found God, who gave strength to his words to convert the Ninivites; when he went on the mountain, he there found God, who mir-

¹ Non est ulla creatura invisibilis in conspectu ejus; omnia autem nuda et aperta sunt oculis ejus.—Heb. iv. 13.

² Se Deo non abscondit, sed Deum sibi abscondit.

³ Surrexit Jonas, ut fugeret in Tharsis a facie Domini.—Jonas i. 8.

aculously caused the ivy to spring up, in order to shelter him from the rays of the sun; wherever he went, he could not escape the eye of God. In vain did the wicked elders say to Susanna in the garden: "Behold, the doors of the orchard are shut, and nobody seeth us,"¹ for the eye of God discovered their wickedness and publicly convicted them of it; they were condemned to death, and were stoned by the people. In vain do adulterers try to hide their vices under the cover of the night; for, as the Wise Ecclesiasticus writes: "Every man that passeth beyond his own bed, despising his own soul, and saying: Who seeth me? Darkness compasseth me about, and the walls cover me, and no man seeth me, whom do I fear?"² Fool that you are! you ask whom do you fear? You would fear the presence of a man, and it is the dread of being seen that makes you look for some hidden corner; how, then, are you so senseless as not to fear the presence of God? "And he understandeth not that His eye seeth all things." The darkness is not dark to God, nor do shut doors exclude Him. "The eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most secret parts."³ In vain do you still endeavor, O sinner, to escape the eye of God; fly up to the clouds, if you can, and you will find God there; hide yourself in a crevice of the earth, and God will be there, too; go down, if you will, into the abyss of hell, and there, too, God will be present, as the Prophet David says: "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell, Thou art there."⁴ If you go out, says St. Augustine, you will be seen; if you come in, you will be seen; if the candle is lit, you will be seen; if it is extinguished, you will be seen just as well; "fear Him who sees everything, or seek for a place where He cannot see you, and then do as you please."⁵

¹ Ecce ostia pomarii clausa sunt, et nemo nos videt.—Dan. xiii. 20.

² Omnis homo qui transgreditur lectum suum, contemnens in animam suam, et dicens; quis me videt? Tenebræ circumdant me, et parietes cooperiunt me, et nemo circumspicit me; quem vereor?—Ecclesi. xxiii. 25-26.

³ Et non intelligit quoniam omnia videt oculus illius; quoniam oculi Domini multo plus lucidiores sunt super solem, circumspicientes omnes vias hominum, et profundum abyssi, et hominum corda intuentes in absconditas partes.—Ibid. 27-28.

⁴ Quo ibo a spiritu tuo? et quo a facie tua fugiam? Si ascendero in cœlum, tu illic es; si descendero in infernum, ades.—Ps. cxxxviii. 7, 8.

⁵ Time coram eo qui videt omnia, aut quære locum, ubi te non videat, et age quod libet.—S. Aug. in Soliloq., c. 14.

God takes
special note
of sins, to
the sinner's
deeper
damnation.

Do what you like to shut out the thought of God, He will not be a moment absent from you on that account. He has seen what you were doing, thinking, and saying lately; He still sees and takes note of that secret ill-will you are nourishing against your neighbor; He sees and takes note of the acts of injustice you are guilty of, cheating and deceiving others; He sees and takes note of the bad desires and inclinations that you bring even into the churches consecrated to Him, and which no man can see; He sees and takes note of the unchaste looks you cast on others; He sees and hears the impure conversation, or the uncharitable talk against your neighbor's character, in which you indulge in company; He sees and hears the inhuman cursing and swearing with which you defile your mouth the whole day long, to the great disedification of others; He sees and takes note of the sin you have for such a long time concealed in confession and carried about in your heart. All this, although you might wish to forget it yourself, is well remembered by God; and you will one day find out that He has seen you, when the abominations you are guilty of will be published before the world, to your eternal shame. Woe to you, O sinner! who now deliberately shut God out of your thoughts, and do not wish to remember His presence! A time will come when you will wish to forget Him; but for all eternity you will have to think of Him to your intolerable torment and misery in hell. How so, my God? Can it be that the thought of Thee, which is now so sweet and agreeable to Thy servants, will hereafter be a part of the punishment of Thy enemies? Certainly, my dear brethren; if a lost soul could forget God, he would be free from the worst of his torments; but not for a single moment will he cease to remember in the liveliest manner and to acknowledge what he has lost in God; he will be always saying to himself, this God I could have possessed if I had wished, and had thought oftener of His presence during my life; but now I can have no part in Him forever. "The wicked shall see, and shall be angry, he shall gnash with his teeth and pine away."¹

Conclusion
and exhortation
to remember
the presence
of God in
temptation.

Ah, Christians, do not let matters get so bad with us! Let us now think of the Lord with joy and consolation of the soul, and as far as possible keep ourselves constantly in His presence; wherever we go, whatever we do, let us keep this thought before our minds, "God is looking at me; God is with me." - He is here in this room, in the street, in the garden, in this company;

¹ Peccator videbit, et irascetur, dentibus suis fremet et tabescet.—Ps. cxi. 10.

everywhere I am surrounded by Him. "Whatever I do," says St. Augustine to Him, "Thou seest more clearly than I who do it; for all my actions are known to Thee, who art present everywhere, as the perfect inspector of all thoughts, intentions, pleasures and actions."¹ How, then, could I dare to do anything contrary to Thy holy will? With these thoughts we must arm ourselves against all temptations, dangers, and occasions of sin; and, like the chaste Susanna, when the elders threatened to accuse her of adultery, so that she should be condemned to be stoned to death, and she, thus pressed on all sides, was considering her position, saying: "If I do this thing, it is death to me; and if I do it not, I shall not escape your hands,"² let us make the firm resolution: "It is better for me to fall into your hands without doing it, than to sin in the sight of the Lord."³ Such should be our thought in every temptation. Shall I sign this unjust, usurious contract? I might do it at once, and no one would be the wiser, while it would bring in a good sum, that would help the household expenses; but the great God sees me; it is better for me, then, to starve with my wife and children than to sin in the sight of the Lord. Shall I now take secret revenge on that man? He has grossly insulted me, and I have a fine opportunity of taking satisfaction; I would have done it long since; but the great God sees me! It is better for me to restrain my spirit of revenge, even if my reputation were to suffer before the world on that account; better do that than sin in the sight of the Lord. Shall I indulge in this sensual gratification? I can do so if I will; my inclination to it is very strong; my passions are urging me to it with violence; no man sees me; but the great God is looking at me; He is present here! away, then, with the filthy passion! it is better for me to restrain it, and to forfeit all the delights of the world, than to sin in the sight of the Lord. So let us think and resolve in all other temptations and occasions of sin. Once for all, my dear brethren, he who wishes to keep his conscience free from sin, and to be always in the friendship of God, must keep God before his eyes; there is no

¹ Quidquid facio, ante te facio, et illud, quidquid est quod facio, melius tu vides quam ego, qui facio; quidquid enim semper operor, tu semper presens cernis, ut pote perfectus inspector omnium cogitationum, intentionum, delectationum, et operationum mearum—S. Aug. in soliloq., c. 14.

² Si enim hoc egero, mors mihi est; si autem non egero, non effugiam manus vestras.—Dan. xlii. 22.

³ Sed melius est mihi absque opere incidere in manus vestras, quam peccare in conspectu Domini.—Ibid. 23.

better or surer means of avoiding sin than the constant recollection of the presence of God.

**Repentance
for past sins
and resolution
to remember
always the
presence of
God.**

Ah, would that I had attended to that long ago! I should not have sinned so often, so grievously, so shamefully! O my God, worthy of all honor and love! How disgracefully I have acted towards Thee in Thy very presence, before Thy face! The birds of the air have greater respect for a scare-crow than I have for Thy presence. O great God! When the birds see the straw figure moved about by the wind, they fly away from it in dread, and do not dare to pick up a single seedling from the ground. Thy presence does not inspire me with such fear and respect! I have acted like those birds, who, when they see that the straw figure is unable to hurt them, actually roost on it; so have I, too,—shame to me, that I should have to say it!—acted towards Thee. I have sinned, and Thy goodness and mercy has borne with me, and Thou hast not punished me; but instead of being moved thereby to confess and repent of my sins, I have only sinned against Thee with all the greater audacity. Far greater right hadst Thou, than king Assuerus in former times, to cry out to me: what! miserable mortal! hast thou dared to act thus in My presence, while I was actually looking on? I, thy rightful Lord and Master, whose least sign thou shouldst obey? In My presence, who am thy sovereign Benefactor, with whose gifts Thou art richly endowed from the crown of thy head to the sole of thy foot? In My presence, who am thy Father, from whom thou hast received thy life, to whom thou owest in all places a debt of child-like fear and love? In My presence, who am thy Saviour, and have shed My blood for thee to save thee from eternal death? In My presence, who am thy future Judge, and who, at the moment in which Thou didst commit sin, could have hurled thee into hell? In My presence thou hast dared to act thus disgracefully? Enough, O Lord! I must acknowledge my vileness! But where shall I creep to hide my shame? And yet, why do I ask? I cannot escape Thee. So that there is nothing for me but to bewail with sorrow of heart the insolence I have been guilty of towards Thee. “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee,” I say with the Prodigal. I have sinned, nor could I be guilty of greater wickedness. Father, I have sinned against Thee, who dost love me so much; which is still worse for me! Father, I have sinned against heaven; a terrible thing, that my sins should cry to heaven! but what most troubles and fills me with shame is this: I have sinned before Thee, in Thy sight.

Alas, what madness possessed me? I acknowledge, O Lord, that I forgot Thee then! I did not think of Thee and Thy presence, and that was the sole cause of my misfortune and guilt! Henceforth I will make better use of what I have learned, and will keep myself always in Thy presence. "I will fix my eyes upon Thee,"¹ like Thy servant David. Not only will I turn them to Thee now and then, but I will keep them fixed on Thee, that they may never be distracted from Thee and Thy presence, so that I may never sin again. Amen.

On the Reasons we have for constantly keeping in the Presence of God, and on the Consolation and Advantage to be derived from it, see several sermons in the following Fourth Part.

¹ Firmabo super te oculos meos.—Ps. xxxi. 8.

ON AVOIDING THE DANGERS AND OCCASIONS OF SIN.

FIFTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON AVOIDING BAD AND DANGEROUS COMPANY.

Subject.

To keep free from sin, and to persevere in good, we must be on our guard against, 1. bad company, especially; 2. and also against dangerous company.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Easter.*

Text.

Hæc locutus sum vobis, ut non scandalizemini.—John xvi. 1.

“These things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalized.”

Introduction.

Those parts of the human frame that especially scandalize the heart, that is, lead it into sin, are, according to Our Lord, the eyes, the hands, and the feet. “If thy eye scandalize thee,” He says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, “pluck it out, and cast it from thee,”¹ that its dangerous glances may not lead you into sin. “If thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee,” the former by dangerous touches, the latter by leading you into the danger of sin, “cut it off and cast it from thee.”² I have already said, my dear brethren, with regard to the eyes, that we must guard them carefully, if we desire to persevere in good and to keep free from sin. Now I will speak of the feet, which must also be well guarded, lest they should bring us into all sorts of company, in which we, weak mortals as we are, and naturally inclined to evil, might suffer harm. Therefore I say, as the subject of this exhortation:

¹ Si oculus tuus scandalizat te, erue eum et proijce abs te.—Matt. xviii. 9.

² Si manus tua vel pes tuus scandalizat te, abscide eum, et proijce abs te.—ibid. 8.

Plan of Discourse.

To keep free from sin, and to persevere in good, we must be especially on our guard against bad company, as I shall show in the first part. We must also be on our guard against dangerous company, as I shall show in the second part.

Give us Thy grace to this end, O Lord; we ask it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

Man above all other creatures has this peculiar quality, that he easily and readily imitates what he sees and learns from others like himself. We have daily experience of that in little children, whose sole occupation is, generally speaking, imitating others; the little girls, as they are most of the time with their mother or the maid-servants, set up toy kitchens, in which they have their little plates, dishes, pots, and pans; or they carry dolls about, dress them, put them in the cradle, and do everything to them in imitation of their mother or nurse. The boys, too, imitate those of their own sex; they make paper and paste-board houses; build castles of wood and stone, which they glue together; ride broomsticks, as if they were on horse-back, about the house and up and down the street; they make little carts and wagons; belt on swords and take spears in their hands like soldiers; dig graves and hold a funeral; erect and adorn little altars, say Mass, preach and sing, as they see done in the churches. All this is a proof of our natural inclination to imitate and follow the example of others.

Man is by nature apt to imitate others.

Not only the pastimes of children, but also, if we duly consider the matter, many kinds of art, which are held in great esteem in the world, are hardly anything else but imitations. Painters, sculptors, engravers, employ their greatest skill in imitating nature, and in representing each subject as it is created by the almighty God. The art of the organist consists in representing by the pipes of the organ the notes of the human voice; of musicians, in symbolizing by the different changes of harmony the passions and inclinations of the heart; of actors, in imitating as well as possible the persons of kings, peasants, soldiers, and beggars, and in representing the different passions of anger, grief, joy, and so on. And with regard to the manners, customs, usages, dress, and style of conversation in the world, what else are those things but imitations, by which one man follows his neighbor's example, and behaves exactly as he sees others behaving? To introduce a new fashion in dress, all that is neces-

As is evident in all kinds of people.

sary is for some lady or gentleman of rank to dress in unusual style, and at once there will be some people ready to say to themselves, I am not of worse condition than he or she, and I can dress in that way, too. These, in turn, will be imitated by others, and so in a short time the fashion of a whole town will be altered. So true is it, as the philosopher Aristotle remarks, "that it is natural to men from their childhood to imitate others, and in that way they differ from other animals."¹

And we are more apt to imitate bad actions than good.

This consideration, my dear brethren, and also the fact that our nature has been corrupted by the sin of our first parents, is the basis of the proposition I have undertaken to prove; namely, that he who deliberately frequents bad company cannot long remain good and holy. If we were all so constituted as to be ready to imitate the good qualities we see or hear of in others, what an excellent thing would not that faculty of imitation of ours then be! For in that case it would be a desirable thing for the good and pious to mix with wicked sinners, nor would any good man fear being corrupted by bad example, as the wicked would rather learn from the good. But, alas, deplorable condition of ours! who does not see and experience that we poor mortals, already inclined as we are to evil, are much more likely to be led astray by bad example than to profit by good? Take a glass of pure and fresh water, and another of muddy, brackish water; mix the two in one vessel, and see what will be the result. Will the dirty water be purified, think you? No, indeed; you would have to wait a long time for such a thing as that to occur. The clean, fresh water will absorb the dirt and salt of the other, and so both will be spoiled. "With the holy thou wilt be holy," says the Holy Ghost by the Prophet David, "and with the innocent man thou wilt be innocent, and with the elect thou wilt be elect;" but no matter how good and holy you are, if you go with the wicked, you will not long preserve your goodness; "with the perverse thou wilt be perverted."² And again, by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "He that toucheth pitch, shall be defiled with it; and he that hath fellowship with the proud, shall put on pride."³ Mark, my brethren, that the proud man does not learn humility from the humble man, but rather the latter learns pride from the former.

¹ Imitari institum est hominibus a pueris, et in hoc differunt a ceteris animalibus.

² Cum sancto sanctus eris, et cum viro innocente innocens eris, et cum electo electus eris, et cum perverso perverteris.—Ps. xvii. 26-27.

³ Qui tetigerit picem, inquinabitur ab ea, et qui communicaverit superbo, induet superbiam.—Ecclesi. xiii. 1.

Much more is this to be understood of other vices, to which our evil inclinations are constantly urging us. The Patriarch Abraham, as we read in the Book of Genesis, thought of procuring a wife for his son Isaac. Isaac was a beautiful, rich, virtuous, and well-reared young man, and the only son of a great patriarch, so that every maiden of the land would have been glad to have been chosen as his wife. But there was not one of them whom Abraham considered fit for the position; and therefore he sent for his steward and said to him: "That I may make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that thou take not a wife for my son of the daughters of the Chanaanites, among whom I dwell."¹ He then sent him into far-off Mesopotamia, to seek a good and virtuous bride for his son amongst his own kindred. But is it possible that in such a great and populous country as Chanaan then was no young maiden could be found to suit Isaac? Is it possible that a good woman was such a rarity that not one was to be had amongst the thousands who were in the land? St. Ambrose, Oleaster, and other authors answer this question by saying that at that time the Chanaanites were, as a general rule, addicted to idolatry. Although Abraham could rest assured of the firmness of the faith of his son and of his whole family, and had not the least reason to fear that they would ever lapse into idolatry, yet he thought, and rightly, too, that, if a heathenish woman came into his house, she would in course of time pervert the whole family and lead them away from God. As Abulensis says in his person, "the son, while he is still young, spends most of his time with his mother."² Now, if my son Isaac and the rest of my dependents run no risk of being perverted, yet perhaps the heathenish mother may hereafter give her little children an image of a god to play with, so that they and her grand-children even may be infected with idolatry. No, was Abraham's conclusion, I will not run the risk; any woman to whom even a remote suspicion of idolatry can be attached is not a fit wife for my son, nor should she become a member of my family. Truly, a sensible, prudent, and fatherly decision! For that very reason God afterwards bound the Israelites by an express command not to marry strange women: "You shall not go in unto them, neither shall any of

Therefore Abraham did not ask a wife for his son among the people of the country in which he was living, on account of the danger of being led into idolatry.

¹ Ut adjurem te per Dominum, Deum cœli et terræ, ut non accipias uxorem filio meo de filiabus Chanaanæorum, inter quos habito.—Gen. xxiv. 3.

² Filius maxime conversatur cum matre, quando tener est.

them come into yours: for they will most certainly turn away your hearts to follow their gods."¹

For the same reason God commanded the Israelites to kill the idolaters.

Read the Book of Josue, my dear brethren, and you will see to your great astonishment an account of a terrible and bloody slaughter ordered by the celebrated and holy leader of the Israelites, according to the express command of God, on his entry into the promised land. Whenever he came to a hostile city or country, he ordered all to be put to death, without any regard to age, sex, or condition, "Man and woman, young and old."² He caused thirty-one kings to be strangled, and thirty-one kingdoms to be inundated with the blood of their inhabitants, without sparing a single one; wherever he went, "he left not any remaine therein, but slew all that breathed, as the Lord the God of Israel had commanded him."³ What a strange manner of making war and taking possession of the enemy's country! The general rule is to get possession of the towns and the country, and to bring the inhabitants under subjection. And if it sometimes happens that a town, after a long and desperate resistance, is captured and destroyed by fire and sword, that is done only as a warning to the others, and in order to make them submit more easily through fear of being served in a similar manner. But to butcher the inhabitants everywhere, what could be the reason of that, if not to satisfy cruelty? And why did the God of justice and goodness command Josue so strictly to massacre all that opposed him on his entry into the promised land? Because He did not wish to expose His chosen people to the constant danger of being led into idolatry by the inhabitants of those countries; and therefore they were all to be exterminated, without exception. So difficult does it appear to the almighty God for one who has bad companions around him not to be infected by their vices.

How much greater the danger of being led by bad company into those sins to which we are already inclined by nature.

My reflections on this, my dear brethren, are as follows: idolatry is one of the worst kinds of sins, because it takes from the soul the first cause of its spiritual life, namely, the grace of faith, which in all sins that do not destroy the faith remains after the loss of sanctifying grace. Besides, this sin, if considered in itself, has nothing to flatter the senses, or to gratify pride, or to glut the cravings of avarice; and therefore it has nothing to attract our inclinations; yet Abraham was in dread

¹ Non ingrediemini ad eas, neque de illis ingredientur ad vestras; certissime enim avertent corda vestra, ut sequamini deos earum.—III. Kings. xi. 2.

² A viro usque ad mulierem. ab infante usque ad senem.—Jos. vi. 21.

³ Non dimisit in ea ullas reliquias, sed omne quod spirare poterat interfecit, sicut præceperat ei Dominus Deus Israel.—Ibid. x. 40.

lest his son, if he associated with idolaters, should be led astray; and the Lord God Himself ordered such a terrible slaughter of so many people, to keep His own chosen nation from the danger of being contaminated by their example. Alas, I must think, what reason, then, have we not to fear those bad companions, who by their conversations, teaching, flattery, caresses, and example pave the way for us to vices, to learn which we require no other master than our own evil and carnal desires? There is no doubt about it, "They will most certainly turn away your hearts," if you wilfully trust yourselves in their society. Still another circumstance worthy of your attention: Abraham was afraid that one idolatrous woman would corrupt his whole family. But why? Could he not have rather argued in the contrary sense, and said to himself: there are so many in my house who are all zealous believers in the true God and lead virtuous lives; if a heathenish woman comes to us and daily associates with them, in a short time they will persuade her to give up idolatry, and by their good example will lead her on to virtue, so that we will thus gain over a soul to God? No, my dear brethren, such was not the current of Abraham's thoughts; he was rather afraid that that one person would infect all the others with her own spiritual malady; nor did he entertain any hope of her conversion being effected by all the other members of his family. For the same reason God did not wish to leave one of the idolatrous inhabitants in the promised land, because He knew how dangerous it is to associate with even one wicked person.

And so it is in reality; one bad companion is often more than enough to corrupt and lead astray a number of people. Have you ever heard that a scabby sheep became sound by going with healthy sheep? No; but if the shepherd does not separate it from the flock at once, it will infect all the others. "Mix rotten apples with good ones," such is the simile used by St. Vincent Ferrer, "and in a short time the whole lot will get bad;"¹ twenty good apples will become bad, if one rotten one is put amongst them. The celebrated statue that king Nabuchodonosor saw in his dream, the head of which was of gold, the shoulders and breast of silver, the body of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet part of iron and part of clay, fell to the ground shattered in pieces, so that it became dust and was blown away by the wind. What was it that destroyed such a great statue? A single stone that fell from the mountain on its feet: "A stone

One bad companion is enough to lead many astray. Shown by a simile.

¹ *Misce poma corrupta cum bonis; brevi erunt omnia corrupta.*

was cut out of the mountain, without hands; and it struck the statue upon the feet thereof, that were of iron and of clay, and broke them in pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of a summer's threshing-floor, and they were carried away by the wind; and there was no place found for them."¹ Amongst other moral interpretations of this wonderful vision, there is one that serves for my present purpose. Suppose that in a family the head is of pure gold, namely, the father is pure as gold as to his conduct and life; the mother is refined as silver; the children as modest and reserved as brass; the servants, by their industry and diligence, as strong and faithful as iron: even then one stone of scandal, thrown among them, is enough to destroy the whole beautiful statue. A wicked servant comes into a family the members of which lead holy lives; an immoral companion finds his way in; the children are entrusted to some devil's teacher for their education; alas, that is quite enough to shatter to pieces the beautiful gold, silver, and brass, to ruin the morals and destroy the harmony of that family, and change its virtue into vice! "Know you not," says St. Paul, "that a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump?"² A married woman who is too free in her conduct, and is not sufficiently observant of the fidelity she owes her husband, is a source of scandal to a whole neighborhood; an ill-reared, already corrupt child can infect a whole school by his bad example; a bold, vain child of the world, dressed in an un-Christian manner, casts a stone of scandal in the way of the eyes and hearts of a whole town. Now, if one wicked person can do so much harm, and induce others to follow his bad example, what will he not have to fear who recklessly goes into bad company and does not care with whom he associates?

Warning to
parents to
watch over
their chil-
dren in this
respect.

And what will become of those children who are not sufficiently looked after; who are allowed to run about the streets all day with low companions; who have permission to go where they wish, to speak and play with whom they please; whose parents trouble their heads little about what servants they have, as long as the work of the house is done, and who allow their children to be on intimate terms with the servants? Is it any wonder

¹ Abscissus est lapis de monte sine manibus, et percussit statuum in pedibus ejus ferreis et fletibus, et comminuit eos. Tunc contrita sunt pariter ferrum, testa, æs, argentum, et aurum, et redacta quasi in favillam æstivæ aræ, quæ rapta sunt vento, nullusque locus inventus est eis.—Dan. ii. 34, 35.

² Nescitis quia modicum fermentum totam massam corrumpit?—I. Cor. v. 6.

that, with such bad companions around them, the children are instructed in wickedness from their very cradles? Ah, Christian parents, look after your children carefully in this particular, if you wish them to be eternally happy in heaven. Take pattern by the pious Sara. She once saw her son, the little Isaac, playing with the son of her handmaid Agar, who was certainly not well brought up. "Cast out this bond-woman and her son,"¹ she cried out to Abraham, filled with a holy jealousy; otherwise your son Isaac cannot remain good. Cast out, not only the dissolute child, but his mother also; the evil must be torn up by the roots. Christian father! out of the house with that servant, that maid, from whom your children can neither see, hear, nor learn anything good. Away with all young men from whom your daughters can expect nothing but sentimental folly, even if they are of decent families, nay, even if they are your own blood relations.

And all of you, without exception, fly bad company, if you expect to remain good and holy. "Depart from the tents of these wicked men," such was the warning given by Moses to the Israelites, and which God now gives to all of us, "and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be involved in their sins."² And not alone must we flee company that is evidently bad, in which attempts are made to lead us astray by talk and conversation, by advice and teaching, by flattery and caresses, and in which a bad example of vindictiveness, injustice, drunkenness, impurity or other vice is given us, but we must also shun dangerous company, as we shall see in the

To all, to avoid bad company carefully.

Second Part.

By dangerous company, I mean that in which, seeing the weakness of human nature and its inclination to evil, one is likely to commit sin, at least in thought. Such company must as far as possible be avoided by those who are anxious to save their souls; for, according to the words of the Holy Ghost, "He that loveth danger shall perish in it;"³ he who goes unnecessarily into danger, or who loves it, will certainly fall into sin. Such company is generally found in those ale-houses in which all kinds of people meet for the purpose of drinking; and, humanly speaking, it can hardly be that one who goes into such

Dangerous company is to be found in many ale-houses.

¹ Ejice ancillam hanc et filium ejus.—Gen. xxi. 10.

² Recedite a tabernaculis hominum Impiorum, et nolite tangere quæ ad eos pertinent, ne involvamini in peccatis eorum.—Num. xvi. 26.

³ Qui amat periculum in illo peribit.—Ecclus. iii. 27.

society, although he may not have had any bad intention at first, does not place his soul in danger. For, where a lot of people meet there are sure to be some reckless characters present, who speak ill of and criticise the actions of others, detract from their neighbors' fair fame, curse and swear, indulge in immodest buffoonery and unchaste discourses and songs; and it is in such things that amusement is generally, if not always, sought in such places. And even if there were no danger of the kind, yet we should be deterred from going to those houses by the occasion that is offered in them either for drunkenness, or at least for such a degree of intemperance that is for most people the cause of other sins, as we have already seen in detail. If a person wishes now and then to drink a moderate quantity, in order to enjoy himself in a lawful manner, and to preserve his strength for the divine service, that is not forbidden; nay, it is a meritorious work if performed with that intention. But could not that be done better in one's own house, with pious, good people of one's own acquaintance? Certainly, no prudent master would refuse to allow his servants or apprentices to enjoy themselves at home; for thus they can be sure that they for whose souls they are responsible are not doing anything sinful. Nor does the wine or beer cost any more if you send to the ale-house for it, than if you go there yourself to drink it.

The innocent are often led astray in them.

Ah! how I pity those still innocent children and students who are obliged to live for the whole year in such houses; the difficulty they must find in prosecuting their studies, which is the purpose for which their parents have sent them from home, is the least thing to be complained of; it is the innocence of their precious souls, which suffers and is so often ruined, that I deplore most of all! They often see and hear from the frequenters of such places things they should not even dream of. And how I pity, too, those young women who are hired as waitresses and attendants on such guests. Oh, truly, they are in a dangerous position, if they are not well grounded in the fear of God! I will say nothing of those landlords (I hope none of them are here present) who keep or tolerate in their houses women of doubtful character, in order to attract custom. Such people are really bad company, wicked betrayers of souls, and, as it were, publicans of hell, who collect a tax on the souls they try to deliver over to the devil.

Familiarity with the

Further dangerous company for all is the too free and unrestricted intercourse with persons of the opposite sex. Too free

and unrestricted intercourse, I say; for, it is impossible to avoid all such company completely, unless for those who are shut up in a convent. Besides, even holy Religious are often compelled by duty, necessity, charity, or decency to meet persons of a different sex. I am speaking now merely of those who seek such company without reasonable cause, and solely because they like it, and make it an occasion of laughing, joking, and otherwise amusing themselves. Who can doubt that there is danger in such company? Every one will say that we are likely to have rain, when the air feels damp, the sky is covered with dark clouds, and the wind comes from the West. All agree that a long-continued fever is a dangerous illness for a weak, wasted body. And even if the rain does not fall, nor the sick man die, yet the danger of rain or of death has been evident enough; for, the danger of an evil consists in the combination of those circumstances from which the evil is likely to follow and does often follow. Now, speak the honest truth: when two or more people of different sexes are together (and that is like putting fire and straw together), with the intention of amusing one another, and doing their best to make themselves mutually agreeable, laughing and joking to their hearts' content, since the devil does not fail to excite the passions when he gets the chance (and yet he need not give himself much trouble on such an occasion, for evil thoughts arise easily from wilful and vain looks, and much more easily still, when they are helped by agreeable conversation and laughter), are not these circumstances sufficient to point to the evident danger of sin?

What sin? you ask. Amongst decent people there is not such great danger of anything wrong being allowed. I answer in the style of the Schoolmen: there is no danger of anything outwardly wrong being done; *transeat*, that may be; no danger of anything wrong being done in thought and desire; that I deny altogether, and with me hundreds of theologians and holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church, as quoted by Theophilus Raynaud, in his book on the care required in conversations with persons of the opposite sex. St. Hugo, who was often obliged by his duty to converse with women, never deliberately looked one of them in the face for forty years, and knew them only by the sound of their voices. Our St. Aloysius, as Bartolus writes in his Life, was once playing a game of forfeits with other noble youths at court; the condition of the game was that he who lost should perform, by way of penance, whatever was

opposite sex
is danger-
ous.

And must
be allowed
only with
the greatest
care, and
under the
pretext of
courtesy.
Shown by
examples.

laid on him by those who won. (Oh, wicked games, generally speaking, in which persons of different sexes are engaged!) Now, Aloysius happened to lose, and the penance enjoined on him was to kiss the shadow of a young girl that was thrown on the wall opposite. The holy youth, full of shame, ran off out of the room, left his pledge there, and could not be induced to take part in such games any more. To say nothing of many others, who did not even wish to venture into the company of their own sisters, I think and say now: A St. Hugo did not dare for so many years to look deliberately on a person of the opposite sex, although his duty obliged him to have frequent dealings with women, and therefore he could expect the special help of God in such occasions. A St. Aloysius thought even the shadow of an innocent young girl a source of danger, so that he did not wish to touch it, and ran away from it to avoid risking his soul. But where young and light-minded people come together, who are not given to constant prayer, fasting, and penance, as St. Hugo and St. Aloysius were; who are not so well armed as those saints with the fear and love of the omnipresent God; who do not dread the shadow of a person of the opposite sex; who look at each other freely and unrestrainedly; who stand and sit in close proximity to each other, laughing, talking, and amusing themselves, and not hesitating sometimes to take each other by the hand, there, there must not be the least danger to dread! Every one may have his own opinion on the matter; for my part, I should look on it as a miracle, if in such circumstances, where the outward senses meet with so many objects to inflame the passions, there were no danger of sin, at least in desire. According to the old saying, where such familiarity is allowed, purity must suffer.

Even great servants of God were led into sin by such company.

Not without reason does God admonish us by the wise Ecclesiasticus to be most careful in this respect: "Sit not at all with another man's wife."¹ Mark those words; when necessity does not require it, you must not even sit beside a person of the opposite sex; and the reason is given in the same chapter: "Many have perished by the beauty of a woman, and hereby lust is kindled as a fire. Many, by admiring the beauty of another man's wife, have become reprobate; for her conversation burneth as a fire."² Ah, how many have been perverted in that way!

¹ Cum aliena muliere ne sedeas omnino.—Ecclesi. ix. 12.

² Propter speciem mulieris multi perierunt, et ex hoc concupiscentia quasi ignis exardescit. Speciem mulieris alienae multi admirati, reprobi facti sunt; colloquium enim illius quasi ignis exardescit.—Ibid. 9, 11.

Hear what St. Augustine says in reference to occasions that some in his presence were maintaining to be of small account and not very dangerous. Laying his hand on his bosom, as if he wished to confirm by an oath the truth of his words, he said : “ Believe me, I have seen the cedars of Lebanon, men who were more firmly rooted in virtue, and whose minds were raised higher towards heaven, than the loftiest cedars ; I have seen them fall to the ground in such occasions and company, so that I wondered at it no less, nor was less terrified by it, than if I had beheld a St. Jerome falling from the height of his sanctity and becoming a public sinner, or a St. Ambrose denying the faith.”¹ In the Lives of the Saints we read of men who were models of holiness, such as Macarius, James, John, Victor, Guarinus, all men of great perfection and of long-tried virtue, who lived apart from the world in convents or deserts, spending their time in works of penance and mortification, till their bodily strength was exhausted; old veterans, who, after having long fought under the standard of Jesus Christ, at last fell into the most shameful crimes. And who was able to make them fall like that? The devil cannot boast of doing it in his own person; for years he had made war on them; he had appeared to them in the shape of fierce lions, of swine, and of oxen, and beaten them till they were half dead; but he was not able to conquer them. The cause of their ruin was a woman, with whom they at first began a holy conversation, and then committed sin. Who can read without pity of the holy hermit of whom Macarius writes? He had bravely endured the rack, the fire, the iron, and all the cruelty of the executioner rather than deny his faith ; but when he was brought back into prison, half dead, he fell into a shameful sin of impurity with the maid-servant who brought him his food. O dangerous company, which can pervert even a heroic martyr, and turn the brightest stars of the heavens into fire-brands of hell! And yet people think so lightly of it nowadays! It is even sought for expressly, and made a matter of previous arrangement; while the impure thoughts and desires that arise in such company are not even made matter of confession, since people deceive themselves by imagining that they did not consent to those thoughts. What! Not consent to them? Did you not voluntarily place the cause from which such thoughts arise?

And here I must utter a just complaint against those parents

Complaint
against par-

¹ *Crede mihi, cedros Libani, et doctores gregis sub hac specie corruisse vidi, de quorum casu non magis dubitabam, quam de Hieronymi et Ambrosii.*

ents who
allow their
children to
go into dan-
gerous com-
pany.

who are careless of their children in this respect; who, as I have often said before, when speaking of this damnable abuse, allow them to sit till late at night at the doors, when the neighbors assemble, and talk and laugh in the dark with each other about God knows what. And I must complain, too, of those parents who dress their daughters up in an extravagant, not to say scandalous style, and bring them into all sorts of company, that they may know something of the world as soon as possible, and learn how to behave in society; (we go with them, they say, so there is no danger. Do you think so? Are you, then, able to watch over their hearts? I am afraid that you would require some one to watch over your own first!) of those parents who allow their daughters to be alone with the person they intend marrying; (what more dangerous company can there possibly be, than this?) of those parents who look on while their daughters laugh, joke, and enjoy themselves with persons of the opposite sex, and actually laugh with them. Ah, what can be the result of such a way of bringing up children? "A virgin should tremble, and grow pale," says St. Ambrose, "when a man approaches or addresses her." What will become of them when they are not merely permitted, but even encouraged, not to blush at the approach of a man, but to act with the utmost freedom towards him? Careless, un-Christian way of training children! what an enormous amount of vice and sin you cause in a town, in a whole country! Alas, what account will such parents be able to give of themselves on that day, when the great book will be opened in which all their actions are written down? But, they say, it is the custom for young people to meet together and amuse themselves; others may do it, and why not my son or daughter also? Why should my children be the only ones to remain at home? Ah, there you are again with the perverse customs of the world! If there is anything in what you say, then it is the custom to bring up children badly, and to lead them on the broad road on which so many are travelling towards hell. I lose patience when I think of this and similar abuses.

Exhortation
and resolu-
tion to
avoid dan-
gerous com-
pany.

Christians, he that loveth danger shall perish in it; such is my conclusion in the words of the Holy Ghost. Let us think of this, and carefully avoid dangerous company, and not venture into it unless we are compelled by necessity, or by our position or duty; but especially must we shun that company in which we know by experience that our hearts are turned away from heaven

¹ Trepidare virginum est, et ad omnes viri ingressus p. vera.

to earth. Even in solitude, when we are alone, we cannot sometimes avoid temptation; why, then, should we wantonly seek the occasion of many temptations? That courtier, who left the world and retired into the desert, in order to save his soul, well understood that. When he was asked the reason of the change he made in his life, he answered by pointing to a picture representing a garden surrounded by a high wall, in the middle of which was a tree, blown about by the wind and almost torn out by the roots; under the tree was the inscription: "What if it were on the sea?"¹ By the walled-in garden he understood his solitary life; the tree represented himself; the stormy wind, temptation; and the high seas, the world, and the ordinary intercourse with men. His meaning was, if I am not safe from temptation in solitude, what would it be if I were in the midst of the turmoil of the world? If I have many a hard battle to fight here, so as to keep on the way of salvation, what fearful combats would I not have to sustain, if I had in addition to resist the attacks of countless dangerous objects? Ah, that is really the case, as I must acknowledge with Thomas à Kempis: "As often as I went amongst men, I returned less a man."² Therefore, if my duty, or necessity, or Christian charity, or courtesy does not oblige me to go into company, I will keep with Thee, O my God, who art present everywhere with me! And if solitude becomes tedious to me, if I find it hard to keep away from company into which I would willingly go, then I will think: if it is now so hard for me to remain alone a short time, what will it be hereafter, when I shall have to spend eternity in the flames of hell, surrounded by demons? To avoid that terrible company, should any difficulty or weariness seem too great now? I will think of that beautiful heaven, in which I hope to live forever in the society of the angels and saints, eternally praising Thee, O my God! In that heaven I will now live constantly in thought, and will say with Thy holy apostle, St. Paul: "But our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who will reform the body of our lowliness, made like to the body of His glory,"³ so that, with glorified bodies and illumined by the light of glory, we may rejoice with the elect for all eternity. Grant us, O

¹ Et quid in pelago?

² Quoties inter homines fui, minor homo redii.

³ Nostra autem conversatio in coelis est, unde etiam Salvatorem expectamus Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum, qui reformabit corpus humilitatis nostrae, configuratum corpori claritatis suae.—Philip. iii. 20, 21.

Lord, we humbly beg of Thee, Thy powerful grace to strengthen us in this resolution. Amen.

FIFTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON HUMAN FRAILTY IN DANGEROUS COMPANY AND OCCASIONS.

Subject.

He who does not carefully avoid dangerous company and occasions cannot long have Jesus Christ as his companion and friend, for our weakness, great enough of itself, becomes greater in such company and such occasions.—*Preached on the second Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Vocatus est autem et Jesus et discipuli ejus ad nuptias.—John ii. 2.

“And Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the marriage.”

Introduction.

Truly, that was a joyous and happy marriage-feast, at which Jesus, the Son of God, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and the apostles of Our Lord appeared amongst the guests! Who would not willingly have been with them? Ah, Christians, would that all our social gatherings, conversations, meetings, entertainments, and marriage festivities were so arranged that we could invite Jesus without scruple to be present at them! But how many there are, especially during Shrove-tide, who in such assemblies cannot hope to have Jesus Christ as their friend and companion, or at least cannot have Him long! I allude to company from which the danger and occasion of sin is not far removed. Christians, if you wish to bear that sacred name in reality, ah, be on your guard as well as you can, not only at Shrove-tide, but at all times, against such company, if you do not want to lose Jesus, but to keep Him as your friend and companion! But this latter will not be the case, if you go into that company without urgent necessity, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

He who does not carefully avoid dangerous company and occasions cannot long have Jesus Christ as his companion and friend. Why so? Because our weakness and frailty is already great enough of itself, and it becomes still greater in such company and such occasions. There is the whole subject of to-day's sermon.

That we may fly from those dangers, help us by Thy grace, O Christ Jesus; we ask this of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary, and the protection of our guardian angels.

By dangerous company and occasions I do not now mean those meetings of two or more persons who assemble together for wicked purposes, or who generally commit sin when they meet; for such meetings are evidently sinful, and, in fact, they are the proximate occasion of sin. It is well known that they must be avoided just as carefully as sin itself, as I have elsewhere proved in detail. To-day I am speaking only of that company which, although many a one comes away from it without having committed sin, yet is apt to inspire evil desires, to give rise to temptations, and to lead into sin. For instance, if a man runs on ice in winter time, although he may happen not to fall, yet he is doing a very dangerous thing, and if there is no necessity for him to go on the ice, and he does fall, people are more likely to wonder at his foolhardiness than to pity him. It is the same with dangerous company; in the matter of temperance, when occasion is given to drunkenness; in the matter of justice, when opportunities of unjust gain are offered; in the matter of charity, when there is danger of giving way to anger, quarrelling, fighting, cursing, swearing, calumny, and detraction; in the matter of holy purity, when one is likely to be led into sins of bad thoughts, imaginations, and desires, on account of the too great freedom allowed with persons of the opposite sex; and it is this latter danger I wish to speak of particularly in this sermon. In a word, each and every circumstance that gives occasion to any kind of sin, and that each one knows best by his own experience to have been the occasion of sin, or at least of temptation to him, that is dangerous for him.

What is meant by dangerous company.

Such company and occasions, I say, must be most carefully avoided, if we wish to keep Jesus Christ, that is, His grace, as our friend and companion, and to preserve the purity of our conscience; nor can any one hope to do this for a long time

He who wantonly goes into such company will

not long
have Jesus
as his friend.
Shown by
a smile.

who ventures wantonly into such occasions, and that on account of our inborn frailty. No one who knows that he is of a weak and delicate constitution will expose himself to the attacks of an enemy who is always persecuting him; and if he does not carefully avoid that enemy, what has he to expect but blows and hard treatment? But if he were to open all the doors of his house to his enemy, what would be the consequence? And still more, if he were to provoke his enemy to attack him? Nay, what has he to expect if he actually throws down the weapons with which he might make some attempt to defend himself, gives them into the hands of his enemy, and thus renders the latter still more powerful against him. Would not such a man be looked upon as mad? Would there not be reason to conclude that it is his deliberate intention to allow himself to be conquered and beaten?

We have to
contend
against
many pow-
erful foes.

What is our life on earth, my dear brethren? Well known are the words of God by the Prophet Job, "The life of man upon earth is a warfare."¹ At all times, in all places, we have a most important combat to sustain, on which the fate of our immortal souls depends, and if we are vanquished, our souls are lost; a most dangerous combat, too, because opposed to us there are enemies who far surpass us in strength and power, who are countless in number, and most relentless and cruel in their nature; moved by the bitterest hatred, they have sworn to watch us day and night, that they may lose no opportunity of hurling us into eternal misery. The first and chief of those enemies is the devil with all the powers of hell, who is called in the Gospel, "the tempter."² In cunning and craft he is unsurpassable; for he has profited by long experience and by many victories gained over a great number of men, so that, as holy Job says, no one on earth is so powerful as he: "There is no power upon earth that can be compared with him who was made to fear no one: . . . he is king over all the children of pride."³ And, "your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour."⁴ Ah, be on your guard, poor mortal, that you fall not into his clutches! And we have another still more dangerous domestic enemy, from whom we cannot fly, and who ac-

¹ *Militia est vita hominis super terram.*—Job vii. 1.

² *Tentator.*—Matt. iv. 3.

³ *Non est super terram potestas quae comparetur ei qui factus est ut nullum timeret: ipse est rex super universos filios superbiae.*—Job xii. 24, 25.

⁴ *Adversarius vester diabolus tanquam leo rugiens circuit, quærens quem devoret.*—I. Pet. v. 8.

companies us everywhere, no matter how careful we are; for, even if we were to hide in the caverns of the earth, we should not be able to escape his attacks. That enemy is our own corrupt flesh, which rebels against the spirit and right reason; our evil inclinations and desires that are always inciting us to sin, even against our will. I will say nothing of the perverse world, which, as St. Augustine says, gives occasion to thousands of sins by its human respect and vain fear of displeasing others, by its false maxims and principles, by its flattery, by its new-fangled fashions and abuses; nor will I now speak of those with whom we have to live and converse daily, and who lay all sorts of snares for us to lead us into sins of anger, impatience, cursing, and swearing. "And a man's enemies shall be they of his own household,"¹ says Christ in the Gospel of St. Matthew.

O my God, who can look on himself as safe in the midst of so many foes! What strength and power must not be required to resist them properly! But, poor mortals that we are! we are so miserably weak, that I am at a loss for a comparison that can duly represent our frailty. The child walking on the slippery ice is not so likely to fall as we are to sin, even when all dangers and occasions are far removed from us. True, indeed, are the words of the Apostle, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels,"² that is, the treasure of sanctifying grace, of which we must be as careful as we should be of glass, lest it be shattered to pieces.

Whom we
are too
weak to
resist of
ourselves.

Alas, when I go in thought into Paradise, and see Adam there in a place of holiness, in a state of innocence and justice, richly endowed with such great graces, illumined with such light and perfect knowledge of divine and natural things, and nevertheless falling so deplorably at a single word from a woman, for the sake of pleasing whom he at once made up his mind to displease his God, and to doom his posterity to eternal death, and that, too, for such a wretched thing as a mouthful of fruit, from which he could easily have abstained in a garden filled with the choicest kind of fruit; Adam, I say, whose flesh was not yet rebellious against the spirit, whose desires were not, like ours, opposed to right reason, and who was yet so weak that he allowed himself to be overcome by a slight temptation—oh! I think, what great reason have we not to fear and to be on our guard, we, who are so weak when compared to him, and who are sub-

Of this we
have an
example in
Adam.

¹ *Inimici hominis domestici ejus.*—Matt. x. 36.

² *Facimus autem thesaurum istum in vasis fictilibus.*—II. Cor. iv. 7.

ject to so many violent temptations, even when we do not seek them? And what was it that led Adam to commit such a grievous transgression? It was not so much the desire to taste of the fruit, as the example and persuasion of his wife. For he saw how eagerly Eve had eaten the apple, although she was forbidden to do so under pain of death; he saw, too, that she did not die at once, and when she held out the fruit to him and asked him to taste it, he yielded immediately, and acted without hesitation against the divine command and against his own better lights. Oh! I think again, what power over our hearts has not the example of others with whom we associate!

In David. The same thoughts occur to me when I remember how king David, a man after God's own heart, inflamed with divine love, and a model of perfection, was perverted by a chance look at a person whom he saw far off, and whom he was not at all seeking; and perverted to such an extent, that he rushed headlong into the most abominable crimes, and for long years forgot his Creator, whom he had formerly loved with his whole heart, and forgot Him till the Prophet at last opened his eyes!

In St. Peter. And when I consider the prince of the apostles, St. Peter, who had sworn that he would rather die than leave his divine Master, and who, nevertheless, not only left Him, but denied Him three times running on oath, not forced thereto by soldiers with drawn swords, nor by a judge threatening him with the stake or the gibbet, but by a few words of a wretched maid-servant; when I consider this, I am forced to cry out in amazement: alas! poor mortals that we are! how is it that we are so weak and so liable to fall! And therefore I must warn you all, in the words of St. Paul, "wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."¹ If those mighty giants have fallen before such contemptible foes, what have we not to fear, who are but dwarfs compared to them? If those strong pillars, who with their virtue and holiness seemed to bear up the heavens, were overthrown so easily, can we be sure of ourselves, who are but straws in comparison to them? If those beautiful stars, which have, as it were, shed their light on others, were darkened so soon, how little it must require to extinguish the feeble light that we are carrying about in earthen lamps, exposed to the furious storms of the world, and beset with a thousand dangers to our souls!

¹ Ita que, qui se existimat stare, videat ne cadat.—I. Cor. x. 12.

And yet (O my God, what presumption!) we who are so weak that we should with reason keep ourselves in safety at home as far as we can, we actually rush into new dangers! We seek on purpose the occasions of sin, and wantonly go into the midst of the fight, that is, into company in which occasion for temptation and sin will be given, and in which holy servants of God are often led astray. Is not that opening the doors and windows to the enemy, and giving free admission to sin and vice? Is it not making ourselves twice as weak as we were before; weak inwardly and outwardly? Is it not abandoning the little spiritual strength still left us, and surrendering our arms to the devil, that he may gain an easier victory over us? And, finally, is it not wilfully sacrificing sanctifying grace and the friendship of God, and sinning without scruple? For, what are the weapons that the enemy of our souls makes use of to our destruction? They are our own evil desires and inordinate appetites. But where could they be more inflamed than when attractive objects are presented to them, which please both eyes and ears? For, as St. Jerome remarks, thereby reason is befooled, the understanding darkened, and the will captivated and bewitched. And what is it that presents to our senses such objects, especially in the matter of impurity, if not dangerous company and occasions, in which persons of both sexes meet together frequently for the purpose of amusement? That is the company in which, amidst unrestrained and friendly conversation, flattering words and caressing manners, and the excitement of laughter and amusement, the fire of lust is enkindled, the imagination inflamed, the corruption of our nature awakened, and the devil gains his wished-for prey.

He therefore acts presumptuously who goes into such company without being compelled by necessity.

Now, O man! amidst so many attacks of most powerful enemies that assail you on all sides, internally and externally, how do you expect to be able to keep free for any length of time, at least from impure thoughts and imaginations, and to come away with a good conscience? A man of great holiness was once asked by the brethren of his order what he would have done if he had been present in a certain temptation and occasion in which they had been. He thought a while, and then answered: "I know what I ought to have done; but I cannot say what I would have done."¹ "Oh, no! no one, no matter who he is," says St. Cyprian, "can long keep from sin if he goes without necessity into such dangerous occasions."²

For he is in great danger of sin.

¹ Scio quid facere debuisssem; sed nescio quid facturus fuisssem.

² Nemo tutus est periculo proximus.

There are many such presumptuous people.

And yet, alas, how little people think of the danger! How many Christians there are, even amongst those who are reckoned good and pious, who not only have no fear of such company, but make an almost daily habit of frequenting it? Persons of both sexes, boys and girls, men and maid-servants, and neighbors, men and women, stand and sit, walk, laugh, and joke together, even with the parents' consent, in the one room, or at the door, or in the street, in the evening, till it is quite dark, or else they go for a walk together outside the town and in the public gardens. Persons of both sexes, married and single, habitually spend at parties the precious time given them by God for the sole purpose of saving their souls (but that, important as it is, is the least to be considered in the matter), and squander it away till late at night, playing cards, talking, singing, and dancing, as if they were made of different materials from other people; as if they had received from heaven a written assurance, confirming them in grace, so that no temptation could ever induce them to give their consent to sin in future.

In vain do they rely on their good resolutions.

And on what, in God's name, do they ground this fancied security? Perhaps on their firm purpose never to sin against God and holy purity by thoughts or desires, words or conversation, or outward actions, at such parties and in such company? For they generally pretend that there is no harm in them, and that they are but an innocent form of amusement. Ah, how wretchedly they deceive themselves! No danger of sin even in thought and desire, in company of the kind! For once or twice that might perhaps be the case; but how is it credible, nay possible, that one who is in the habit of frequenting such company should avoid all sin? For each time it is and remains dangerous. And what reason have we poor mortals to trust so much to our purpose of not offending God? Our forefather Adam had the same purpose in the beginning; so had David, and so had Peter; yet, when the danger and the occasion came, they fell most disgracefully. It is one thing to have the purpose of not sinning, and another to carry out that purpose when the time comes, especially in circumstances that are apt to offer a gentle violence to our inclinations and appetites.

For the presence of the occasion drives the resolution out of their heads.

Read what the Book of Exodus says of this in the thirty-second chapter: Moses was speaking with God on Mount Sinai, and meanwhile the Lord saw that the people had made a golden calf, and were dancing round and adoring it. Filled with indignation, He said to Moses: "I see that this people is stiff-necked;

let me alone, that My wrath may be kindled against them, and that I may destroy them.”¹ Be patient, O Lord, said Moses; restrain Thy anger! Remember that they are Thy chosen people, whom I have conducted thus far with such care. What would the Egyptians say? They would say: “He craftily brought them out, that he might kill them in the mountains, and destroy them from the earth.”² Pardon them, O Lord! If Thou wishest to wreck Thy vengeance on any one, behold me; slay me if Thou wilt, but spare my beloved people! “Let Thy anger cease, and be appeased upon the wickedness of Thy people.”³ What do you think, my dear brethren, of this mildness, meekness, mercy, and love on the part of Moses? Could it well have been greater? And in spite of His anger, God was appeased and pacified by it: “And the Lord was appeased from doing the evil which He had spoken against His people.”⁴ But wait a while, till Moses has come down from the mountain to the camp: “And when he came nigh to the camp, he saw the calf and the dances.”⁵ And in a moment, as the Scripture says, “being very angry, he threw the tables out of his hand, and broke them at the foot of the mount.”⁶ Fire flashed from his eyes, and he cried out in a voice of thunder, “if any man be on the Lord’s side, let him join with me: put every man his sword upon his thigh; go and return from gate to gate through the midst of the camp, and let every man kill his brother, and friend, and neighbor.”⁷ And then, at the command of Moses, on that day were slain twenty-three thousand people.”⁸ Mark, my dear brethren, the difference between the conduct of Moses on the mountain, and in the camp. Was he no longer the same man who had been on the mountain a short time before? Yes. Was he not the same Moses who had appeased the divine anger and obtained forgiveness from God for his erring people? Yes. When on the mountain, did he not know of the sin into which the people had fallen? Yes, for God told him of it. Was it

Shown by
an example.

¹ Cerno quod populus iste duræ cervicis sit: dimitte me, ut irascatur furor meus contra eos, et deleam eos.—Exod. xxxii. 9, 10.

² Callide eduxit eos, ut interficeret in montibus, et deleret e terra.—Ibid. 12.

³ Quiescat ira tua, et esto placabilis super nequitia populi tui.—Ibid.

⁴ Placatusque est Dominus, ne faceret malum, quod locutus fuerat adversus populum suum.—Ibid. 14.

⁵ Cumque appropinquaret ad castra, vidit vitulum et choros.—Ibid. 19.

⁶ Iratusque valde, projecit de manu tabulas, et confregit eas ad radicem montis.—Ibid.

⁷ Si quis est Domini, jungatur mihi: ponat vir gladium super femur suum; ite, et redite de porta usque ad portam per medium castrorum, et occidat unusquisque fratrem, et amicum, et proximum suum.—Ibid. 26, 27.

⁸ Cecideruntque in die illa quasi viginti tria millia hominum.—Ibid. 28.

not the same sin that he saw them commit when he came down from the mountain? Yes. And there was no new feature in it? No. Why, then, did the mildness and meekness of Moses so suddenly become changed into anger and wrath? A moment ago he had offered himself as a sacrifice for the people, and now he slays them without mercy; the good God spares them at the prayer of Moses, and now Moses himself wishes to punish them. Whence came such a sudden change? Do you wish to know the cause of it? Hear, then, what St. Ambrose says: "The eyes have a far greater power of persuading with regard to what they see, than the ears with regard to what they hear."¹ Moses knew, while on the mount, the impurity and idolatry of which his people were guilty; but he knew it only remotely and by hearing, when it was revealed to him by God; but afterwards, when he saw the sin committed, it made a much stronger impression on his mind, so that his meekness was turned into anger.

Especially
the occasion
of impurity.

Now, if such a meek, holy, and loving man was so suddenly changed against his own firm resolution, by seeing an action that was calculated to awaken in him a feeling of anger and disgust, a feeling that Moses appeared to have completely overcome by the virtue of meekness, how difficult must it not be for one who has far less virtue to restrain the passion of impurity, which is the most violent and unruly of all our evil inclinations, and to restrain it in presence of an object that is in itself beautiful, alluring, and agreeable to the eyes; when he has full liberty to act towards that object with the greatest familiarity amid the amusements of a party of pleasure? Who could trust that in such an occasion he would keep firmly to the resolutions, made by him long before, not to sin? Ah! we are not made of steel or iron; and even if we were, there would still be danger for us. Even the hardest and heaviest piece of iron can be attracted in any direction one wishes by the power of the magnet.

In which
even the
holiest have
fallen dis-
gracefully.

Does it not seem as if Ammon should have had a heart as firm as iron, instructed as he was in the school of penance, and brought up in the fear of God by his holy father David? Could any one imagine that there would be danger for him in the company of his own sister Thamar? And yet that company so inflamed his passions that he was guilty of a most horrible crime. An example that should not be forgotten by those people of both sexes who are too familiar with each other under pretext of

¹ Citius persuadent oculi, quod cernunt, quam auris potest insinuare, quod præterit.—St. Ambr. serm. lxxvi.

relationship. Did not Henry VIII., king of England, seem to have had a heart of iron, when, surpassing all the other princes of his time in understanding, knowledge, and zeal for the Catholic faith, he wrote against the heretics so well that he received from the Pope the title of "Defender of the Faith"? Who would have imagined that he would have changed so suddenly and so completely; that he would have forgotten the fear of the Lord, have divorced his lawful wife, lived in open adultery, renounced the Catholic faith, which he had before heroically defended, bathed his hands in the blood of Catholics, and brought all England under the cruel yoke of heresy? Who, I ask, could have foreseen that? And yet, such was really the case with him. And what was the cause of that terrible change? The company and familiarity with a woman who was publicly looked on as of doubtful reputation, Anne Boleyn, for whom he entertained an impure passion. Have you ever read in the History of the Church of what tyrants, such as Nero, Diocletian, Maximian, Lucinius, and others did to overcome the constancy of the early Christians? What were the most powerful weapons they made use of, by which they succeeded in inducing some to abjure the true faith? Perhaps the rack, the sword, the spear, the gallows, and the gridirons with which they threatened them? Ah, no, says St. Cyprian; no torments were capable of subduing those Christian heroes, who only laughed and mocked at them. And what then? The flattery and caresses of the women who were sent into their prisons; that was successful in effecting what neither rack nor torture could do, and in making them deny Christ and adore false gods. "He endeavored," says St. Cyprian, speaking of one of those tyrants, "to do by the power of sensual pleasure what he could not effect by the sword, hunger, or cold."¹ It is sad to read what Surius writes in the Life of the holy hermit Victorinus, who was afterwards a martyr. After having sold all his goods and given the price to the poor; after having become quite emaciated by long and rigorous fasting; after having spent many years in a gloomy cave, so narrow that he could not stretch himself in it, and taking his rest on the bare earth, on which he could sleep only in a sitting position, while, if any one happened to be with him, he could not even sit down, but had to stand; into a place of that kind, which resembled the den of a wolf more than the habitation of a human being, he ventured one night to introduce, out of pure Christian

¹ Ut quos ferro, fame, gelu vincere non poterat, voluptate corrumpere.

charity, a girl who, as he thought, had lost her way; and his only idea in giving her shelter for the night was to save her from the danger of falling down some precipice, or being eaten by wild beasts, if she were to wander about the desert alone. But he acted without having recourse to God by prayer, or taking counsel with Him to guard himself from a snare; he trusted to his emaciated body, and to his, as he thought, fully mortified life. And so he took the supposed girl into his cell. But alas! says the historian, "hardly had one hour elapsed, when he found that the fire of concupiscence was not wholly extinguished in him; the girl's flattering words kindled the flame, solitude gave him the opportunity, and an impure passion induced him to commit the sinful act."¹ Victorinus fell into sin and was immediately laughed at by the devil, who had deceived him under the appearance of a young girl. After this lamentable fall he entered into himself and with sorrow of heart acknowledged that in no place, at no time, in no condition, and not even in old age, should we trust to ourselves or to our good resolutions, unless we carefully avoid dangerous occasions of sin. From this, my dear brethren, you may see what power an agreeable object has over the human heart, when one deals with it too familiarly.

Confirmed
by daily
experience.

But why should I spend so long to prove this? Let each one of you consult his own heart and his own experience. What ideas arose in your mind whenever you happened to cast your eyes too freely and for too long a time on a person of the opposite sex? How often have you not, even in the church, before the altar of God, hearing holy Mass, at which the angels tremble with awe, if you happened to be sitting beside one of the other sex, had enough to do to restrain your curiosity and to repress evil thoughts? On that account it was the custom in early times, and is still in many places, for the sexes to be separated in church. How often has it not happened that if one of the other sex happened to pass by while you were engaged in some devotion, all your attention and devotion vanished at once? Why so? Because a single glance of the kind is enough to turn our thoughts from God, by the inordinate desires it excites. Since that is so, how can you dare to hope that you can spend whole hours, a whole evening, or half the night in company in which people of both sexes pass away the time in amusements, in laughing, joking, and dancing, without experiencing at least

¹ Vix horæ spatium intercesserat; addit igniculum dulcedo sermonis; urget facinus solitudo; furtivus amor scelus perficit.—Surius in vita, 5 Septem.

a thought contrary to the law of God? No, no; your own heart and conscience tell you that it is impossible. And if you wished to deny that before men, you could not conceal it from the all-seeing God, who searches the reins and the heart. But what must be the consequence when one often seeks company of that kind; for the desire of seeing this or that person increases more and more? And finally, what must be the result, if two persons thus attached to each other are in the habit of meeting in secret?

Therefore I repeat my proposition: if we wish to have Jesus Christ as our constant friend and companion, and to keep free from sin, we must most carefully avoid all such dangerous company, unless necessity or the ordinary laws of courtesy sometimes compel us to go into it. Ah! fly, fly the danger! as the wise Ecclesiasticus warns us: "Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent; for if thou comest near them, they will take hold of thee." Mark those words; we must fly sins, not merely as we would the poisonous bite of a serpent; but we must flee from them as from the face of a serpent; we must keep them as far off from us as possible. A wonderful thing sometimes happens to the nightingale; it is singing away cheerfully on a tree overhanging a brook, filling mountain and forest with its pleasing notes, when a poisonous toad comes creeping up, and looks open-mouthed at the songster. What follows? At the first glance the bird ceases its song; its joy is at an end; it feels a violence it cannot resist; its wings refuse to support it, and it falls from branch to branch until it falls into the open mouth of the toad and is swallowed by it. That may be the result of some secret power of fascination, or it may be caused by the poisonous breath of the toad; but in any case it is certain that the mere neighborhood of the latter is fatal to the poor bird, although the toad may not have bitten it, nor otherwise injured it. Athanasius Kircher writes of a similar occurrence that once happened to a man. In the year 1660, a hunter in Switzerland came across a winged dragon of about the size of a vulture; he at once took aim at the dragon with his loaded gun, and shot it through the throat, so that it fell dead on the ground. The hunter, overjoyed at the success of his shot, went to look at the dragon, and touched it with his hand; but the bare sight and touch of it was just as bad as if he had imbibed its poison. Hardly had he arrived home, when he died suddenly from the effects of the poison, which he had absorbed through his eyes and hand. Christian

Therefore
we must
shun all
dangerous
company
and occasions.

¹ Quasi a facie colubri fuge peccata; et si accesseris ad illa, suscipient te.—Eccius. xxi. 2.

soul, there is a poisonous dragon for you in that young man who flatters and caresses you; in that young girl who smiles so invitingly at you; in that beautiful figure you admire so earnestly; be careful and do not venture to be too familiar with such dangerous company, for the bare sight of it is enough to attract your heart by natural sympathy; the mere vicinity, I will not say touch, of such persons is enough to infuse poison into your veins, and to take away the life of your soul. "Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent;" that is, avoid everything that could be even remotely an occasion of sin to you, although it is not directly sinful in itself, and may not appear to be dangerous.

Flight is
necessary to
save the
soul.

Fly! flight in this matter is commendable and necessary in order to conquer; our weakness is too great for us to conquer in any other way. Not without astonishment do we read in Holy Scripture of so many most valiant heroes flying from their enemies in order to avoid a contest with them. In the Book of Genesis we find Jacob flying from his brother Esau; in the Book of Exodus, Moses flying from Pharaoh; in the Third Book of Kings, Elias flying from Jezabel; in the Book of Jeremias, Urias flying from Joachim; in the Second Book of Kings, David flying from his son Absalom; and in the First Book, David himself flying twelve times from king Saul. In the same way, the Apostle St. Peter takes to flight out of his prison; St. Paul escapes by means of a basket from the walls; Jesus Christ, the almighty God, flies from Herod, and He warns His disciples to fly also: "And when they shall persecute you in this city, flee into another."¹ Flight was not a disgrace to these heroes, for they sought honor and glory therein. Certainly David boasted of it more than once, for he begins some of the psalms, as, for instance, the third, "The Psalm of David when he fled from the face of his son Absalom;"² and the title of the fifty-sixth is, "For David, when he fled from Saul into the cave."³ And so, too, in the spiritual combat we must often take to flight, if we wish to overcome our enemies and to gain the victory. In every society, or company, or friendly conversation, there is perhaps a cruel Esau, a ferocious Saul, who can easily conquer you. There is perhaps a beautiful Absalom, who can ensnare you in the meshes of his curly locks; there is a tricked-out Jezabel, who can bewitch you by her caresses. Perhaps there is a Herod, who is meditating

¹ Cum autem persequerentur vos in civitate ista, fugite in aliam.—Matt. x. 23.

² Psalm David, cum fugeret a facie Absalom filii sui.

³ Cum fugeret a facie Saul in speluncam.

an attack on your virtue, and has already often made you his prisoner; there may be an Aretas, who tries to inveigle you by his presents and to win your heart. Oh, woe to you, Christian soul, if you come too near to them! If you do not wish to be overcome, you must avoid the combat by flight; flight alone can save the life of your soul. "O God," says Dawid, "I have declared to Thee my life,"¹ or, as the Hebrew text has it, "I have declared to Thee my flight,"² I have made known to Thee that I took to flight, in order to show that in such occasions it is the same thing to take to flight and to preserve the life of the soul.

Yes, my God, I acknowledge that to be true, and I know by my own sad experience that I have often been overcome in dangerous company and occasions! Should I not, then, be on my guard against them? Ah, how often do I not complain of my weakness and frailty, and allege them as an excuse for my faults and sins! But it is not that weakness that will condemn me at Thy judgment-seat. I acknowledge, then, that my frailty is so great that it is only with difficulty that I can resist temptations when I am alone at home; why, then, did I lessen the little strength I have, by going without cause into such company, thus opening wide the door to the tempter; for I gave full liberty to eyes, ears, and the other senses to see, hear, and do as they pleased? No, in future I shall be more cautious, and shall try to guard my soul, as I have but one to lose, and to lose forever; to guard it in solitude, whether it is Shrove-tide or Lent, or whatever season of the year it may be. Let men think and say of me what they please; it is a matter of little importance to me. If they ask me, why are you so bashful? Why do you not do as others do? Why do you not go to parties like others of your age and condition? I will answer them as Demosthenes answered, when asked why he took to flight, "I am saving myself for my country."³ I am saving myself for paradise, I will say; heaven is too dear for me to run the danger of losing it. If thus I am deprived of the pleasure to be derived from such company, yet I have still the consolation and great happiness of possessing Jesus, my God, as my friend and companion here on earth, with the hope of having Him in the next life as my reward in the joyous company of the saints in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Conclusion
and resolution.

¹ Deus, vitam meam annuntiavi tibi.—Ps. lv. 8, 9.

² Fugam meam annuntiavi tibi.

³ Servo me patriae.

SIXTIETH SERMON.

ON THE USELESSNESS OF RELYING ON THE DIVINE ASSISTANCE
WHEN WE VOLUNTARILY RUSH INTO DANGER.

Subject.

He who goes into dangerous company and occasions without necessity in vain expects the divine assistance to keep him from sin.—*Preached on the third Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Domine, si vis, potes me mundare.—Matt. viii. 2.

“Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.”

Introduction.

Great was the confidence shown by this leper in the power and goodness of Jesus Christ. He did not complain, as other beggars are wont to do, of his misery; he did not assail Our Lord with importunate cries, Lord, heal me of my sickness! but he merely alluded to the almighty power of Christ: “Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.” He does not even doubt Our Lord’s good will. And moved by this appeal of the leper, Christ said to him: “I will; be thou made clean.” With like confidence, my dear brethren, we should make known to God in prayer the necessities of our souls. He is omnipotence itself, and can help us; He is wisdom itself, and knows our wants; He is goodness and mercy itself, and He will help us, if we only do what in us lies. And I add this last condition, because many have too much confidence in the divine assistance, not doing what they ought to entitle them to it. That is, however, not confidence, but presumption. Such are, amongst others, those of whom I spoke in my last sermon, who frequent dangerous company without necessity, and then trust in “the help of God to keep them from sin.” “Lord, if Thou wilt Thou canst help me,” they seem to say, although I am weak and frail, and inclined to evil; Thou canst keep me from sin, even in that danger, in that company, in that society, in those Shrove-tide amusements. But I am afraid they will have to wait a long time before God says to them, “I will;” go on confidently and trust in My assistance, you will not suffer any harm. No, presumptuous mortals that you are; I tell you straight out, though I am no prophet, that you are deceiving yourselves; God will not

assist you with His help and grace in such circumstances, as I shall now show by way of warning to all; and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

If a man goes without necessity into dangerous company and occasions, he has no right to expect the divine assistance to keep him free from sin; God will deprive him of His help in punishment of his presumption; and for that reason dangerous company should be all the more carefully avoided. Such is the whole subject.

Lord, we will be on our guard against those dangers, and then Thou wilt help us to keep in Thy grace. May we not hope to obtain that favor from Thee, provided Thou helpest us by Thy grace to carry into effect this firm resolution of ours? And that help we beg of Thee with confidence through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

It is true that even the weakest man is strong enough with the help of God's grace to resist the attacks of all the powers of hell, and to come off victorious in the greatest dangers. And it is also true that the good God never abandons a man, unless the latter first abandons Him; that He never refuses His help and grace to those who are disposed to receive it, and that He has promised not to forsake us in temptations, according to the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it."¹ But mark, my dear brethren, what the same apostle says in the same verse: "Let no temptation take hold on you but such as is human."² For there are two kinds of temptation, one which assails us without our seeking it, and which comes as it were by chance and of itself in the daily occurrences of life, and which often gives rise to inordinate desires, to faults and imperfections; and this kind, since it is only too common amongst us poor mortals, is called human temptation. The other kind is that into which one goes of his own accord and without being compelled by necessity: and of that the Apostle says in another place, "Give not place to the devil;"³ and it is therefore called diabolical temptation, because to rush open-eyed into the danger and occasion of sin is a malice more diabolical than human.

When we wilfully rush into danger, we cannot expect the help of God.

¹ Fidelis autem Deus est, qui non patietur vos tentari supra id, quod potestis, sed faciet etiam cum tentatione proventum, ut possitis sustinere.—I. Cor. x. 13.

² Tentatio vos non apprehendat, nisi humana.—Ibid.

³ Nolite locum dare diabolo.—Ephes. iv. 27.

Now, in those temptations that are human, and assail us against our will, there is no doubt that God will help us by His grace to overcome them without special difficulty, provided we earnestly co-operate with Him; but in the other class of temptations, that are wilfully sought for without necessity, we cannot reasonably hope for or expect the grace of God; nay, according to the general arrangements of divine Providence, even if one were to ask for grace in such circumstances, it would not be given him. By grace here I mean what St. Augustine calls victorious, efficacious grace, that is, a grace by which one really resists his evil inclinations and overcomes the temptation.

As a general rule God will not give His graces under such circumstances.

And what right or title have you to expect and to obtain this special help from God if you rush wantonly into the danger? Perhaps you have a right founded on justice? But God owes nothing to any one; otherwise the helps He gives would not be graces, which He does not bestow on us according to our will, but according to the decrees of His infinite wisdom, and He gives them when, how, and to whom He pleases, as St. Cyprian says.¹ Perhaps you have a right founded on His goodness and mercy? But you make yourself altogether unworthy of it by your presumption. Lastly, perhaps your title is founded on His fidelity? But nowhere do we read that He has promised the special helps of His grace to any one under such circumstances. He rather threatens quite the contrary, by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "He that loveth danger, shall perish in it."² I will abandon him who seeks the danger, and allow him to perish in it. If, then, you wish to argue according to the rules of sound logic, you must come to the following conclusion: God is infinitely faithful and true in His words; what He has foretold must certainly come to pass, so that I will certainly sin and perish in the danger which I seek and into which I rush without necessity, because God has expressly said that such will be the case.

And justly. Shown by similes.

And with justice does God act in that way towards men. In fact, it is the way in which we men act to each other. If a respectable man is overtaken by a misfortune which he could not foresee, no one, unless a sworn enemy of his, but would pity him. But if you see a man, in spite of oft-repeated, friendly warnings, going headlong to ruin, running all sorts of risks in the most reckless manner, and finally going to the bad altogether, oh, you think, it serves him right! He was warned often

¹ Ordine suo, non arbitrio nostro, virtus Spiritus Sanctus ministratur.—S. Cyp. *de sig. char.*

² Qui amat periculum, in illo peribit.—Eccles. iii. 27.

enough, and should have known better. You pity the innocent child that is bitten by a dog ; but if a naughty boy, who has been provoking the dog, gets bitten, you have no pity for him, and you think he has got what he deserves. Now, if such is the opinion of sensible men in such cases, has not the almighty God still more right on His side to act as He does ? Hear what He Himself says : “ Who will pity a charmer struck by a serpent, or any that come near wild beasts ? ”¹ A mountebank will caress a living serpent, and put his finger in its mouth, as such people often do on fair-days ; but if he is at last bitten by the serpent, so that he dies from the bite, who will pity him ? No one ; he is the cause of his own misfortune. Let me now represent to you, my dear brethren, two men, one of whom was a king, the other a philosopher ; the first was Ingor, king of Russia ; the other, Heraclides, a pupil of Plato. Both were killed by the bite of a serpent. The former was out hunting one day, when he knocked his foot by chance against the skull of a dead horse, in which an adder lay concealed ; the adder sprang out at once, and bit the unfortunate king in the foot. Thus perished the unhappy Ingor. Truly, it was an unfortunate thing for him to lose his life, where he had no reason to suspect any danger, and, no doubt, you have a heartfelt pity for him. But Heraclides was not so deserving of your commiseration. He had as pets two tame but poisonous serpents, which accompanied their master everywhere he went, as if they were his servants ; they used to eat with him at the same table, nay, sometimes even out of his mouth ; he often used to caress them with his hand, and at night they slept in the same bed with him. But one night it happened that Heraclides, turning over in the bed in his sleep, was bitten by one of the serpents, because he pressed rather too hard on it, and he died from the bite. And it serves him right, you will think ; he might easily have guessed that such would be his fate sooner or later ; for he who makes a pet of a poisonous serpent must expect it to bite him. “ So it is,” continues the wise Ecclesiasticus, “ with him that keepeth company with a wicked man, and is involved in his sins.”² For dangerous company and occasions are poisonous adders and cruel serpents ; if you go into them without necessity, and frequent them without scruple, and then fall under the assaults of

¹ Quis miserebitur Incantatori a serpente percusso, et omnibus qui appropriant bestiis?—*Ecclesi.* xii. 13

² Et sic qui comitatur cum viro iniquo, et obvolutus est in peccatis ejus.—*Ibid.*

temptation, who will pity you ? Who will help you ? The almighty God with His extraordinary graces ? Oh, no ; He has not placed them at the disposal of any one in such a way that we can deal recklessly in their regard. “Spiritual strength,” says St. Cyprian, “is conferred on us to make us careful, not to encourage us to be reckless.”¹

For God
does not
give grace
to the pre-
sumptuous.

True, “He hath given His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee up ; lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.”² But that protection will be given “in thy ways,” not in your headlong rushing into danger. In your ordinary ways ; that is, in the occasions that you cannot avoid, and that you must go into, in order to fulfil the duties of your state, although there may be temptations and dangers of evil in them ; in those the angels will perform their office, and endeavor to protect you from sin ; but not in those occasions into which you rush without necessity, and for the purpose of gratifying your inordinate appetites, your sensuality, or your impure inclinations. Do you know the answer that Christ gave the tempter, when the latter brought Him up to the pinnacle of the Temple, asking Him to throw Himself down, to prove the truth of the divine promise, “He hath given His angels charge over thee, etc.” ? No, said Our Lord to him ; “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord, thy God.”³ From this you may conclude that to expect the special help of grace in dangerous company that one seeks deliberately, or frequents for the sake of amusement, is not confidence in God, but rather presumption, and tempting God. True, God has prepared His special graces for men ; but for what men ? For the prudent, modest, and careful ; not for negligent and careless Christians. He has prepared them for whom ? For the just man, who is humble and cautious, who knows his own weakness and frailty, who watches over his outward senses, and shuns all danger as far as he can ; but not for a reckless, heedless man, who without the least scruple gives all liberty to his senses, and rashly loves dangerous occasions. Not the vain, the dissolute, and the careless, but the modest and reserved, who are fond of keeping at home, are the souls in whom the grace of God loves to dwell.

Such as they
are who
rush into

You refuse to take any trouble to protect yourself, and place all your hope on the help of God ; you despise the grace by which

¹ Ita nobis spiritualis fortitudo collata est, ut providos faciat, non ut præcipites tueatur.

² Angelis suis mandavit de te, ut custodiant te in omnibus vis tuis ; in manibus portabunt te, ne forte offendas ad lapidem pedem tuum.—Ps. xc. 11, 12.

³ Non tentabis Dominum Deum tuum.—Matt. iv. 7.

He tells you not to go into that house, that company, and expect Him to help you in a special manner when you are actually in the midst of the danger, that you may not be overcome by it; you have not the least hesitation in taking part in those amusements, in going with those persons, in joining in that Shrovetide merry-making, although you are liable to meet all sorts of persons who are dangerous to you; and you think that God will protect you, watch over your heart, and keep the unclean spirit from entering it; is not that presumptuously tempting God, and desiring Him to stretch forth His hand to work a miracle for you? Nay, is it not asking Him to be a partner and helper in your presumption? "Vain is the hope," says St. Augustine, "that expects to be safe in the midst of allurements to sin." Have you ever heard of any one venturing out to sea in a ship, after the sailors have told him that she is not seaworthy? Have you ever heard of any one going into a house, after the neighbors have warned him that the plague is in it? In the Life of the holy monk Simeon, who lived and died here in Treves, I read an account of a man whose recklessness cost him dear. The Saint was sailing on the Nile in a Venetian vessel, when they met another ship, the helmsman of which cried out in a loud voice: Do not go any farther, good people! there are pirates farther on, whom I have barely managed to escape; go back at once! The captain of the Venetian vessel disregarded the warning, and kept on his way. After a little they again met a ship, the whole crew of which shouted to him at the top of their voices to return, or he would fall into the hands of pirates and lose life and property, adding that they themselves escaped only, as it were, by a miracle. The captain acted as if he had heard nothing, and sailed along as before. Immediately after, a third ship came up, making off as fast as possible, while the pale countenances of the crew, who were almost disabled with wounds and were therefore unable to call out to warn the others, spoke as plainly as possible of an imminent danger, but the Venetian captain disregarded this third warning, too. Then St. Simeon said to him privately: "my brother, if Our Lord were to send an angel to warn you, you would be so terrified at the sight of him, that you would turn back at once; but since God has sent people like yourself to warn you to-day, yesterday, and the day before, you should not

danger
without
necessity.

¹ *Lubrica est illa spes, quæ inter fomenta peccati se salvari sperat.*

neglect their advice.”¹ But there was no moving the obstinate man; he thought he was surrounded by cowards, and so he kept on, and the next day he fell into the hands of the pirates. St. Simeon sprang from the ship into the river, full of confidence in God, and repeating the words of the Psalmist: “Thy way is in the sea, and Thy paths in many waters.”² He was enabled by the divine assistance to dive and to keep under water until he reached the shore in safety. But “the obstinate captain was the first of all the others to lose his head,”³ according to the historian. I could wish I had his head here to show to those reckless people who rush wantonly into danger, in spite of repeated warnings. God calls out to them in unmistakable accents, do not go near that house! he that loveth danger shall perish in it! The holy angels call out with their good inspirations, go back; the hellish pirates are lying in wait for you! The holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church call out with their exhortations; preachers and confessors implore them in the name of God to keep away from the danger into which necessity does not compel them to go. All agree in telling them that such occasions and company are a source of danger for their souls, that the Evil One is lying in wait for them there, and that they run the risk of being infected with a mortal spiritual malady. But they care nothing for it all; they trust in the help of God, and hope that He will keep them free from sin. Let them have their way, then; but they will see how it will end with them; they will be, not, indeed, the first, for in all likelihood thousands have already lost their heads in such occasions, but they will certainly be of the number of those who have left such company with their souls mortally wounded; nay, perhaps they may be amongst the wretched ones who have lost the lives of their souls forever. Once for all, “vain is the hope that expects to be safe in the midst of allurements to sin.”

The saints
convict
them of
presump-
tion.

If, says St. Bernard, God were prepared to help us with His powerful graces in those dangers which we seek of our own accord, then those holy people whose example we are exhorted to follow have acted imprudently and have given themselves unnecessary trouble in separating themselves from the society of

¹ Frater, si Dominus Christus de cœlo angelum misisset, tu territus aspectum illius ferre non posses; nunc vero, quia hodie, heri, et nudius tertius non unum sed plures legatos misisti similes, legationem Dei non negligenter suscipere deberes.—*Everuvius in Vita S. Simeon. monachi apud Sur. i. Jun.*

² In mari via tua, et semitæ tuæ in aquis multis.—Ps. lxxvi. 20.

³ Ipsi nauclero primum caput amputant.

men, and living in gloomy solitudes, continually mortifying their senses, in order to avoid the danger of sin. The innocent Job, whose holiness was attested by God Himself, made a compact with his eyes, so as not to admit even a thought of a person of the opposite sex: "I made a covenant with my eyes, that I would not so much as think upon a virgin."¹ St. John Chrysostom cannot sufficiently express his astonishment at this; it seems a strange thing, he says, for such a heroic man, who fought so bravely against the devil, and gained so many victories over him, to fear an innocent maiden and turn his eyes away from her, as if she were more to be dreaded than the evil spirit himself. When he saw the latter approach, he did not fly, but remained, boldly holding his ground and confident that he would be able to overcome him; but he did not dare to remain in the presence of a virgin, and as soon as he saw one approach, he turned his eyes in another direction. "For he thought that in a contest against the demons he should give proof of a manly courage and constancy, but when fighting in the cause of holy purity, that the victory was to be gained, not by seeking, but by avoiding the company of persons of the other sex."² St. John the Baptist, who came into the world endowed with sanctifying grace, and who, according to the testimony of Our Lord, was the greatest of all born of woman, went into the wilderness in his very childhood. St. Jerome, a man of consummate wisdom, took up his dwelling amongst the wild beasts, and used to beat his breast with a stone, while he became so emaciated by constant fasts and austerities, that he almost lost the semblance of a human being; and this he did in order to preserve his soul from danger; yet he complains most piteously that, although the sound of the last trumpet was always ringing in his ears, pictures of the dancing-women he had seen at Rome in his youth were constantly coming before his imagination and tempting him to impure desires. "I," he says, "who was the companion of scorpions and wild beasts, was often present in spirit among the dancing-girls."³ When Vigilantius asked him why he did not live like other men, and reproached him with a cowardice unworthy of a great man, in flying into the desert, he

¹ *Pepigi fœdus cum oculis meis, ut ne cogitarem quidem de virgine.*—Job xxxi. 1.

² *Censebat nimirum in prælio contra dæmones virili et audaci animo opus; in continentie autem præparatione victoriam concedi non ex virginum consuetudine, sed secessu.*—St. Chrysos. de continent. Joseph.

³ *Ille ego scorpionum tantum socius et ferarum, sæpe mente choreis intereram puellarum.*—St. Hieron. Ep. ii.

answered: "I acknowledge my weakness;" for, if my eyes happened to rest on a person of the opposite sex, "I might lose the victory." The innocent St. Aloysius was afraid, as we have seen recently, not only to kiss the shadow of a young maiden, but even to remain in the room alone with his own mother, so that, as soon as he could find an excuse, he left her. See how the great friends of God take to flight in order not to look on anything dangerous, and how they do not dare to hope for any special help from God if they do not avoid such occasions; while you, who frequent company of that kind, and spend your time in laughing, joking, and amusing yourself, have nothing to fear? You hope to be free from all temptations, and to be able to overcome them if they should assail you, because you rely on the grace of God? Ah! that is a vain and deceitful hope!

God helps wonderfully His servants in dangers which He sends them to undergo; but abandons those who wantonly run into danger.

And if it were not, then, indeed, we might all leave our convents and roam about the world at will. Why? Because, whether I am alone or in company, whether I seek the danger or avoid it, I shall be always invincible, for the almighty God will always give me His grace in any case. "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me," I might say with St. Paul. But how would it be with me if I were to depend on that hope? I am well aware that in former times the prophets lived in heathen courts amidst all the vanities of the world, when their duty obliged them to do so, and that they were constantly helped by the special grace of God; that, when acting on a divine inspiration, the hermits left their solitudes and went amongst the people to exhort them to penance, they were strengthened so wonderfully by the grace of God, that they had no reason to fear falling into sin; and when the tyrants of old exposed Christian virgins to shame and dishonor, the latter were protected by God so powerfully, that their purity did not suffer the least attain. But I know, too, that the same God abandoned those who were formerly innocent and dear friends of His, when they went into dangerous company without necessity.

Proved by examples from the Old Testament.

The innocent Dina, daughter of the patriarch Jacob, as we read in the book of Genesis, went out to see the women of the strange land into which she had come: "And Dina, the daughter of Lia, went out to see the women of that country." And her curiosity cost her her maidenly purity. But how is that? Did not

¹ Fateor imbecillitatem, ne perdam aliquando victoriam.—L. adversus Vigilant.

² Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat.—Philip. iv. 13.

³ Egressa est autem Dina, filia Liæ, ut videret mulieres regionis illius.—Gen. xxxiv. 1.

Judith venture into far greater danger, when, decked out in all her beauty, she went into the enemy's camp and spent a whole evening eating, drinking, and feasting with the amorous Holofernes? Why did God protect her from all danger, and abandon Dina? He protected Judith because she went into the danger in obedience to a divine inspiration, while Dina was influenced only by a vain curiosity. And what kind of a woman was Judith, in comparison with Dina? She was a God-fearing widow, who avoided carefully not only every evident danger, but also everything that might remotely tend to lead her into sin: "She made herself a private chamber in the upper part of her house, in which she abode, shut up with her maids, and she wore hair-cloth upon her loins, and fasted all the days of her life; she feared the Lord very much, neither was there any one that spoke an ill word of her."¹ What help and protection could not such a holy woman expect in all temptations and dangers from the God whom she loved so much? Nevertheless, before she went into danger, in obedience to the divine inspiration, and for her country's sake exposed herself to the temptations of an Assyrian camp, with what prudence did she not make her preparations? She first reflected deeply as to whether the idea she was about to carry into effect really came from God or not, and although modesty prompted her to say nothing of it to any one, yet she disclosed her design to two ancients of the people, who had authority in the town, with the sole intention of asking their advice, and of finding out whether their opinion agreed with hers as to the divine origin of the inspiration on which she was about to act; to this end she begged of them to pray fervently for light: "So that which I intend to do, prove ye if it be of God, and pray that God may strengthen my design."² She often asked them to pray for her: "Let nothing else be done, but to pray for me to the Lord, our God."³ Before adorning herself she shut herself up, clothed in sack-cloth, with her head covered with ashes, and prostrated herself before the Lord, praying to Him long and fervently, as we read in the Book of Judith. When she had finished all her preparations, she prayed as she was going out of the gate of the town; nay, she spent a great

¹ In superioribus domus suae fecit sibi secretum cubiculum, in quo cum puellis suis clausa morabatur, et habens super lumbos suos cilicium, Jejunabat omnibus diebus vitae suae timebat Dominum valde, nec erat qui loqueretur de illa verbum malum.—Judith viii. 5, 6, 8.

² Itaque quod facere disposui, probate si ex Deo est, et orate ut firmum faciat Deus consilium meum.—Ibid. 31.

³ Nihil aliud fiat, nisi oratio pro me apud Dominum Deum nostrum.—Ibid. 33.

part of the night in the Assyrian camp in watching and prayer. Frequently she protested that the sole end she aimed at was the honor that would accrue to God, if it could be said one day that He conquered the Assyrians by the hand of a woman. Why should we be surprised, then, if God, who never abandons those who love Him with all their hearts and trust in Him alone, helped His handmaid and kept her free from dishonor and sin, even in the midst of danger? In the same way He protected the innocence of Joseph in Egypt against the caresses of an impure woman; and the conjugal chastity of Susanna He saved from the violence of the two elders; but neither of these dangers was sought voluntarily; for Joseph ran away, leaving his mantle behind him, while Susanna called for help as well as she could. If Joseph and Susanna had loved the dangerous company, as so many do nowadays, would they have gained such a glorious victory? Would they not rather have lost the grace of God, and sinned most shamefully, as a consequence of their foolhardiness?

From the
New Testa-
ment.

We have a still more striking example of this in the New Testament, in the persons of the apostles SS. Peter and Paul. Both were, although at different times, in Jerusalem in the same occasion and temptation: Peter, in the court of the high-priest; Paul, amongst the furious Jews. The question for both of them was whether they would deny Christ, or courageously confess Him. Peter declared to his divine Master: "Yea, though I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee."¹ Paul said to his disciples, "For I am ready not only to be bound, but to die also in Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus."² But how differently they acted in the hour of trial! Peter falls most deplorably, and denies his beloved Master three times on oath, while Paul confesses Him steadfastly. And why? Because Peter trusted too much in himself, and deliberately rushed into the occasion, against the express prophecy and warning of Our Lord; for what had he to do in the house of the high-priest? Why did he go into the company of servants that were enemies of Christ? He should have kept away from them. It was not so with St. Paul. "And now behold," he says, "being bound in the Spirit, I go to Jerusalem."³ It is the voice of God, and not my own will that urges me to go into the midst of the enemies of Christ. If Peter

¹ Etiam si oportuerit me mori tecum, non te negabo. — Matt. xxvi. 35.

² Ego enim non solum alligari, sed et mori in Jerusalem paratus sum propter nomen Domini Jesu. — Acts xxi. 13.

³ Et nunc ecce alligatus ego spiritu, vado in Jerusalem — Ibid. xx. 22.

had gone into the house of the high-priest in obedience to a divine inspiration, he would doubtless have been strengthened by a powerful grace, and have avoided that lamentable fall, which he never ceased to deplore afterwards, as long as he lived. If Paul, on the other hand, had wantonly sought the danger, he would not have fought so valiantly, nor gained such a glorious victory. From this, too, my dear brethren, you may conclude that no one can rely on the help of God if he deliberately runs into danger, but can look on it as almost certain that he will not get the grace of God, and so will fall into sin. Therefore we must all profit by the warning of the Holy Ghost and fly, if we wish to avoid sin.

But, you will perhaps exclaim: what are you saying to us about company? It is not unlawful for the sexes to meet together, to speak and laugh with, and amuse one another! Common courtesy amongst friends and relations requires that. I was often in company of that kind, but I cannot say that I was anything the worse for it. But you are actually trying to make it sinful! No, you are mistaken. I do not say that it is unlawful, nor that it is an evident sin; I only maintain that, when such company is sought too often and without necessity, there is danger of being led away and of committing sin; for the infallible word of God assures us that he who loves the danger shall perish in it. Hear what St. Clement of Alexandria says of the matter: "They who wish to do everything that is lawful will easily be brought so far as to do what is unlawful."¹ If thy right hand scandalize thee," is the well-known warning of Our Lord, "cut it off and cast it from thee." St. John Chrysostom makes a beautiful remark with regard to these words; we must not only cut off the left hand, he says, that is, shun all that is unlawful and sinful; but also the right hand, that is, we must avoid things that are lawful and seem to be harmless, if they can be an occasion of sin to us.

I have often, you maintain, been in company of the kind, but I cannot say that it has done me any harm. St. Augustine answers your objection: "Presumption is an unfortunate and a dangerous thing; for it makes many think they have conquered, when in reality they are conquered."² I quite believe that the company you speak of did not lead you into the commission of

Even apparently respectable company is dangerous, if sought too often.

The excuse that nothing sinful happens is a deceit of the devil.

¹ Qui faciunt quicquid licet, facile dilabuntur, ut faciant quod non licet.

² Infelix est et nimium periculosa presumptio; multi enim putant se vincere, cum victi sint.—St. Aug. lib. de honest. mul.

any sinful outward action; but did you do no evil in your heart? And even if that remained pure for the first two or three times, still I tell you to be on your guard against the deceits of the devil. That crafty enemy sometimes acts towards souls as the leopard does with the ape; the leopard is most eager in pursuit of the ape, because he likes its flesh better than that of any other animal; but the ape, when it sees its enemy coming, climbs up a tree, where it is in safety. The leopard then has recourse to artifice; he lies down at the foot of the tree, restrains his breathing as much as possible, and pretends to be dead. When the ape has seen its enemy lie thus apparently lifeless for some hours, it descends and begins to leap and play about him, not suspecting any danger; but that is the leopard's opportunity, who at once seizes hold of the ape and devours it. I am afraid it will be something like that with you and the dangerous company into which you are so fond of going. For some time the devil pretends to be dead; he leaves you in peace and does not attack you with the least temptation, so that you really come away without committing sin; but why does he act like that? Simply to induce you to believe that you are in no danger, so that you may frequent such company and thus give him an opportunity of assailing you with grievous temptations and leading you into sin. Therefore I warn you in these words of the Holy Ghost: "Never trust thy enemy: for as a brass pot his wickedness rusteth: though he humbleth himself and go crouching, yet take good heed and beware of him."¹

Familiarity
with rela-
tions is dan-
gerous.

You say, too, that it is only respectable people and, in fact, your own friends and relatives with whom you associate. Ah, pretext of respectability! ah, friendship and relationship! how many souls you have brought to destruction! For those very things, good as they may seem in themselves, only add to the danger, since they put one off one's guard, encourage greater familiarity, and thus inflame the heart more strongly with the fire of unlawful love. And must we, then, avoid all friendship and society? No, I do not say that; but you must not seek such company too often, nor make too free in it, especially if you find your passions excited in it. St. Louis, the son of Charles II. of Naples, as Ribadeneira writes in his *Life*, once went to visit his mother, the queen who had not seen him for a long time, and therefore wished to embrace him. "Stop," said St. Louis, "that will not do!

¹ Ne credas inimico tuo in æternum: sicut enim ærumentum æruginat nequitia illius: et si humiliatus vadat curvus, adjice animum tuum, et custodi te ab illo.—Ecclesi. xii. 10, 11.

“But I am your mother,” said the queen. “True,” he replied, “you are my mother, but you are a woman, and therefore a servant of God must not be too free with you.” St. Augustine says that, no matter who they are, persons of the other sex should not be treated with too much freedom: “They who think they can be familiar with women, and yet be victorious, do not know that they are guilty of a twofold sin in the sight of God, inasmuch as they run into danger themselves, and also give a bad example to others of a dangerous familiarity.”¹

St. Gregory gives the greatest praise to the virtues of the holy Bishop Andrew, especially to his angelic chastity. That holy man had given hospitality to a person consecrated to God. Now it happened that a Jew, who was travelling and could not reach Rome in time, was obliged to take shelter in an old temple that had been formerly devoted to the worship of idols. During the night he saw a great number of devils assembled in the place, who each in turn gave to Lucifer an account of what they had been doing during the day to tempt men to sin. One of them, especially, stood up and boasted of having done something great. On being asked what it was, he answered: I have inspired the otherwise holy Bishop Andrew with such an affection for a woman who is living in his house, that on one occasion he jocosely patted her on the back with his hand. Lucifer praised this act above all that the others had done; go on, he said, and in a short time you will conquer him altogether. The Jew, who had heard all this, went next morning to the Bishop, and told him all about it. Immediately the holy man acknowledged his fault most humbly, saw the danger in which he was, and sent the person out of his house. The Jew was thereby brought to see the light of faith, became converted, and was baptized. Here again, my dear brethren, we have an instance of how dangerous it is to cultivate a too great freedom and intimacy with persons of the other sex, although they may be near relations or may be holy people, consecrated to God. Hear the advice that St. Bernard gave his sister: “I warn you, not to allow any man, no matter how holy he is, to be familiar with you, nor, even if he is a religious, to be frequently in your company; lest the purity of both of you should suffer by a too great intimacy; lest, by seeing each other too often, you should lose your innocence; lest relig-

And even
with relig-
ious and
holy per-
sons.
Shown by
an example.

¹ Et qui cum mulieribus habitantes putant se obtinere triumphum, ignorant se apud Deum dupliciter reos existere; dum seipsos in periculum mittunt, et aliis exemplum perversæ familiaritatis ostendunt.—St. Aug. ubi supra.

ion be brought into contempt by your conversing with each other too frequently; for familiarity often conquers those whom vice by itself could not overcome."¹

Exhortation
and resolu-
tion to
avoid all
dangerous
occasions.

By way of conclusion, my dear brethren, I again repeat the words of the Holy Ghost, "Flee from sin as from the face of a serpent."² He who wishes to keep from all sin must imitate the penitent David: "I have hated all wicked ways."³ Mark how he says that he hates not merely all sin, but all the ways that lead to it even remotely. Fly, then, fly as well as you can, the dangerous occasion; I have no better advice to give you; our frailty is too great; God withdraws His grace from the presumptuous, and he who loves danger will perish in it. Ah, my Lord and my God, have I not, indeed, been blind! For such a long time I have been on the very verge of the abyss, and did not know the danger I was in! I have brought the same sin over and over again to confession, and never considered what might be the cause of such oft-repeated falls! Blessed be Thy mercy, which has spared me so long and has at last opened my eyes! Now I see and know what has been the cause of so many temptations and sins to me; that house, that person, that too great freedom in conversation, that company, that society was the stumbling-block over which I have so often tripped and fallen, to my great detriment. Now, since I have learned by experience, shall I again go into such company without urgent necessity? Truly, if I did that, my presumption and perversity would justly embitter Thee against me, and I should deserve Thy anger and the withdrawal of Thy grace! Oh, no; I will practise that humility and modesty to which alone Thou hast promised the special help of Thy grace: I will guard my five senses, particularly my eyes; I will shun with the greatest care all company and conversation which I know to be dangerous, nor will I allow either human respect or friendship to lead me astray in this matter. Thus I can have a firm confidence that Thy grace will always strengthen my weakness against all the other attacks of my spiritual enemies. Amen.

¹ Moneo te ut vir, quamvis sit sanctus, nullam tamen tecum habeat societatem; quamvis sit religiosus, nullam tecum habeat assiduitatem; quare? ne visitandi familiaritate utriusque pereat castitas; et videndi frequentatione utriusque annihiletur honestas; ne loquendi jugitate utriusque religiositas infametur: sæpe familiaritas vincit, quos vitium superare non potuit.—St. Bern. Sermon. lvi. in sororem.

² Quasi a facie colubri fuge peccata.—Ecclesi. xxi. 2.

³ Omnem viam iniquam odio habui.—Ps. cxviii. 128.

On Promiscuous Nightly Gatherings, see the preceding Second Part. On the Shrove-tide Festivities, see the First and Second Parts.

SIXTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON CONFIDENCE IN THE DIVINE ASSISTANCE IN UNAVOIDABLE DANGERS.

Subject.

In the dangers and occasions of sin that daily beset us against our will, and that our duty prevents us from avoiding, each one must, according to the divine decree, trust in God, who will not abandon him who co-operates with His grace.—*Preached on Septuagesima Sunday.*

Text.

Multi enim sunt vocati, pauci vero electi.—Matt. xx. 16.

“For many are called, but few chosen.”

Introduction.

Terrible words! But it is wonderful how many there are on whom they make no impression. “Many are called” to the eternal possession of the kingdom of heaven; “but few are chosen” actually to possess it. And why? The fault does not lie with the Almighty God; He has called all men, without a single exception; all men, as far as He can, He has chosen for heaven. But we need not long consider to find out the cause. If we only look at the lives led by most people in the world, we must acknowledge that they are not chosen; for every day they close the gate of heaven faster against themselves by their sins. And whence come those manifold sins? From our inborn weakness and propensity to sin. But they are not content with that. “Opportunity makes the thief,” says the proverb; they take occasion from the example of others who live according to the flesh and to the vain world, and their rule is to follow that example; they seek occasions in dangerous company, which they frequent without necessity; they love even the proximate occasion, which they do not try to avoid, although they cannot go into it under any pretext without committing a

new sin, as we have seen already. That, I say, is the origin of those manifold sins, and the reason why few are chosen. Alas! I seem to hear some sighing, who are still men of good will, if that is the case, who can be saved? For, who can avoid all the dangerous occasions of sin? Although one may neither seek nor love them, yet he is exposed to them every day; and if he wished to shun them altogether, he would have to hide himself under the earth. And what you say is perfectly true. But this sermon and the following are intended for your consolation and instruction, that you may not despair of being chosen for heaven. I say then—

Plan of Discourse.

In the dangers and occasions of sin that daily beset us against our will, and that our duty prevents us from avoiding, each one must, according to the divine decree, humbly submit himself and trust in God, who will not abandon him who co-operates with His grace. Such is the whole subject of this instruction.

That we may do our part constantly, and so be amongst the small number of the elect, give us Thy light and grace, O God! which we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

There are many dangers of sin that one cannot avoid.

It is an undeniable fact that men in the world are exposed to many dangers which they not only cannot but even dare not avoid or remove. Such is the married state, in which husband and wife are indissolubly bound together until death; and there are different offices and employments, which people are compelled to undertake by divine decree, in order to procure the means of livelihood for themselves and their families, or to further the common weal, or to show due obedience and reverence to their lawful superiors. There are also different degrees of acquaintanceship with all kinds of people, which are matters of necessity for most men in the world, according to the business in which they are engaged; and in those things many a circumstance must arise which might prove a hindrance to the divine service, or an occasion of temptation, thus exposing souls to the danger of sin and of eternal damnation. For occasion is given, and sometimes people are urged by a kind of violence almost, to anger, impatience, cursing and swearing, injustice and ill-treatment of others, pride and vainglory, impurity, intemperance, gluttony, drunkenness and other vices, so that people could often and easily sin against God, unless they are always on

their guard and strain every nerve of their spiritual faculties to overcome temptation.

Ah, God help us, is the cry of many, that is only too true! That is the very thing that makes me uneasy and dissatisfied with my state of life! I would willingly bear with everything, if I were not daily and hourly exposed to the danger of sin everywhere I go. For what else is my married life, but an unceasing source of trouble and annoyance, of impatience, of cursing and swearing, of quarrelling and dissension? My husband is bad-tempered and given to drink; my wife is fond of idleness and an easy life; my children are disobedient; my servants are lazy and obstinate, they must be told a thing twenty times before they think of doing it; one must almost make a servant of one's self in order to look after them; the neighbors pry into everything, and put the worst construction on every act; I cannot even trust my best friends at all times, for more than once they have deceived me, how can one practise Christian patience and meekness under such circumstances? Who can be so well grounded in virtue, as not sometimes to sin by anger and impatience, or by cursing and swearing? What else is my secret poverty and the hard work I must do, but a source of inordinate sadness, and almost of despair, as well as of the sins that arise from it? What is my office or employment, but a snare laid to entice me to commit sins of injustice, unless I am very careful? I have to deal with all sorts and conditions of people, to hear all kinds of talk, to see dangerous objects continually; who can be on his guard so as to keep his senses under control in such circumstances? Must he not now and then break out into unseemly language, or at least sin in thought and desire? In a word, wherever you turn, there are occasions of sinning in thought, word, and deed, and of losing your soul.

I acknowledge the truth of all that; but do you think you are the only one whose salvation is exposed to so many risks? You are not, by any means; for, poor mortals that we are! there is not one in the world who can boast with truth of being free from all danger. There is no state so holy, no order so strict, no household so pure as to exclude temptations; and he who wishes to avoid them all must leave this world altogether, as St. Paul says: "Otherwise you must needs go out of this world."¹ Divine Providence allows temptations to assail men in every state of life, as a means of combat and victory; and they who

A fact of which many complain.

These dangers are common to all states, though greater in some than in others.

¹ *Alloquin debueratis de hoc mundo exisse.*—I. Cor. v. 10.

wish to serve Him zealously are even more exposed to such assaults than they who live in sin. A holy monk once saw a whole legion of devils engaged in storming the convent in which he was living; they climbed up on the roof, entered the windows, and filled the corridors and passages, working diligently the whole time. But over the town he saw but one devil, who was sitting down quite lazily, doing nothing. Surprised at this vision, he began to ask himself how it was that poor monks, who do their best to drive away the devil by constant fasting, prayer, and mortification, are nevertheless surrounded by demons on all sides, while the citizens of the town, who do not fast, or pray, or scourge themselves, are free from the attacks of the Evil One. While thus debating with himself, an angel appeared to him, who at once solved his doubt; because, he said, the monks fight valiantly against temptations, a whole legion of devils comes to oppose them, in the hope of conquering even a few of them. But in that wicked town, in which there is hardly any one to resist them, one single demon is enough to keep all the inhabitants under subjection. Let no one, then, be surprised, nor give utterance to a complaint that is common enough, if he finds that, after having done true penance and freed himself from the state of sin, and commenced to love God sincerely, he is more vigorously assailed by temptation than formerly; for that is an evident sign that he has escaped the snares of the devil, who is now attacking him more fiercely, in order to lead him again into sin. "The more the devil sees that we oppose him," says St. Gregory, "the more trouble does he take to overcome us; for he leaves alone those whom he knows he has peaceable possession of; but his attacks against us become more violent, when he sees that we have driven him out of our hearts, which he wishes to look on as his own property." "And" continues the Saint, "after a man by true penance has overcome the first temptation, God allows the combat to be renewed more vigorously after his conversion, that we may not be too sure of ourselves or look on ourselves as already holy, lest a deceitful security should cause our downfall after we have gained the victory." Therefore no one who is earnestly resolved to

¹ Quanto magis nos sibi rebellare conspiciet, tanto amplius expugnare contendit; eos enim pulsare negligit, quos quieto jure possidere se sensit; contra nos vero eo vehementius excitatur, quo ex corde nostro quasi ex jure propriæ habitationis expellitur.—S. Greg. I. xxix. moral. c. 7.

² Ne conversus quisque jam sanctum seesse credat, et quem morioris pugna superare non valet, ne ipsa postmodum securitas sternat; dispensante Deo permittitur, ut post conversionem suam tentationis stimulis fatigetur.

gain heaven and to serve God has reason to complain of danger or temptation. Still, I freely acknowledge that, while each state has its own dangers and temptations, yet in some states those dangers are greater than in others; and also in some states it costs a man more trouble to overcome temptation than in others.

Now, if God has placed you in a state in which you are more exposed to danger, if He has ordained that you should have greater difficulties to contend with, and to use more violence than others to gain heaven, dare you, nay, can you complain of that, or ask why He has dealt with you so? He can offer you His heaven at whatever price pleases Him; and if He required you to overcome a thousand times more difficulties in order to gain it, certainly heaven is worth striving for, even on those terms. Can He not give a penny to those who come at the last hour to work in His vineyard, as well as to those who have borne the heat and burden of the day? Now, by an all-wise decree of His Providence He has placed you in the state in which you are, and He has arranged, too, all the circumstances of that state (for I take it for granted that you have not entered it knowingly against the divine will); He knows and has known from all eternity all the occasions, allurements, and temptations to sin that are to beset you, or that under any circumstances can come in your way (I again presume that you do not wilfully seek the danger of sin); He knows your strength, too, and how much you can bear; and moreover, as St. Paul says, He is a good and faithful God, who will not allow a heavier burden than you can bear to be placed on your shoulders, nor permit a temptation to assail you that you cannot overcome; nay, He will even make temptation profitable to you.¹ Besides all this, He is the almighty Lord, who will not allow you to fight alone, but will take the greater share of the work and trouble on Himself, and will help you with His grace, so that, if you only will, you may easily overcome the temptation. The observance of the commandments of God is called by Christ Our Saviour, who knew well the difficulties and dangers of every state, “a yoke,” and in fact He calls it “My yoke,” giving us thereby to understand that we are not alone in bearing the divine law, but that God, who helps us, bears it with us; and by His help that which otherwise would be difficult becomes sweet. For the same reason He calls the burden of the commandments, “My burden,” because He shares

They who are exposed to great dangers must be contented and trust in God.

¹ *Fidels autem Deus est, qui non patietur vos tentari supra id quod potestis, sed faciet etiam cum tentatione preventum.* I. Cor. x. 13.

it with us, so that it becomes easy and light. St. John Chrysostom makes a beautiful remark on this: we must not look on the law of God as too difficult, nor as too easy; not as too difficult, lest we should give way to pusillanimity; nor as too easy, lest we should become careless and run the risk of transgressing. Christ did not call His law a yoke alone, nor did He say that it was sweet alone; nor did He call it a burden alone, nor say that it was light alone; "to teach us how careful we must be, He did not conceal from us the fact that it is a burden, nor that it is a light burden; but He put the two together and called it a sweet yoke and a light burden; so that we should not avoid His law as too difficult, nor treat it carelessly as too easy."¹ If you are walking alone up a rugged mountain-side, you have great difficulty in making progress; but if you have with you a strong companion, who gives you his arm to assist you, and tells you now and then how you will best get on (for instance, he says to you, go a little to that side; do not put your foot there, or you will fall; tread on this stone, it is firm, etc.), and, if he sees you stumbling, keeps you from falling, you will find the way much easier. Such is the manner in which God deals with us, if we are in earnest about walking in His ways. "With the Lord shall the steps of a man be directed," says the Psalmist, "and he shall like well His way."² If I wish, God will make the way smooth for me, and will show me where to put my foot, and where not to put it; but on my part it is necessary that I should "like well His way." Sometimes the devil or the world will try to make me stumble against a stone; men will try to lead me into sin by bad example; my own evil inclinations will help them; but if I only wish to keep on the right road, God will be my guide and my faithful and powerful companion, who will stretch out His hand to protect me in all those dangers: "When he shall fall, he shall not be bruised; for the Lord putteth His hand under him."³ Now, O man! if you think the dangers of the state in which you are, and which you cannot change, are greater than in another, you must say to yourself: it is the Lord who has ordained this for me, it is He, too, who is my companion in those dangers; with His help, then, I must and will protect

¹ Ut quanta cura vigilandum esset certiores nos redderet, non scilicet onera nec suavia tacuit, sed utrumque complexus et jugum dixit et suave appellavit, onus apposuit et leve adiecit; ne aut tanquam laboriosa fugeretur, aut tanquam nimium facile contemptu prosequeretur. S. Chrysos. Hom. 39, Matt.

² Apud Dominum gressus hominis dirigentur; et viam ejus volet. —Ps. xxxvi. 23.

³ Cum ceciderit, non collidetur; quia Dominus supponit manum suam.—Ibid. 24.

myself as well as I can, and that help will never be wanting to me if I fly to Him for refuge with confidence. I have spoken of this matter more in detail when treating of the necessity of each one being satisfied with his state of life, as far as his salvation is concerned.

Once more I say that it is and remains certain that the good God has prepared powerful graces and helps for men to enable them to avoid sin in the dangers that are inseparable from their state, provided they work with His grace as they ought. The Holy Scripture gives us abundant proof of this in the conversation that God had with Moses on Mount Horeb. Moses was sent by God as ambassador to Pharaoh in Egypt, to persuade him, or, if necessary, to compel him to allow the Israelites to go out of slavery. "Come," said God, "and I will send thee to Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."¹ Learned and prudent, brave and courageous as Moses was, the thought of the dangers he would run in an idolatrous court frightened him from undertaking the duty; and therefore he humbly begged of God to spare him and to send some one else, who was better fitted for such a task. "And Moses said to God: Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?"² I am too weak for a task like that. In order to encourage him, God told him to throw on the ground the rod which he held in his hand, and it was immediately changed into a serpent. See, Moses, what you can do with such a weak instrument; are you still afraid on account of your weakness and incapacity? But Moses was not yet satisfied; it is true, he thought, I have worked a miracle; but it was done in the desert, where God is with me to help me. To work miracles when there is no occasion for them, and when God is there to help, is one thing; but to work them when there is really necessity and danger, is another thing. He then put forward his want of eloquence: "I beseech Thee, Lord, I am not eloquent from yesterday and the day before; and since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant, I have more impediment and slowness of tongue."³ "I beseech Thee, Lord," he continued, "send whom Thou wilt send,"⁴ but do not send me. In order, then, said the Lord, that thou mayest lay aside all

Who gives special graces to those who are in unavoidable dangers. Shown by an example from Scripture.

¹ Veni, et mittam te ad Pharaonem, ut educas populum meum, filios Israel, de Ægypto.—Exod. iii. 10.

² Dixitque Moyses ad Deum: quis sum ego ut vadam ad Pharaonem?—Ibid. 11.

³ Obsecro, Domine, non sum eloquens ab heri et nudius tertius; et ex quo locutus es ad servum tuum, impeditioris et tardioris lingue sum.—Ibid. iv. 10.

⁴ Obsecro, Domine, mitte quem missurus es.—Ibid. 13.

fear, and mayest look on thyself as safe even in the midst of danger, I tell thee, "Go therefore, and I will be in thy mouth; and I will teach thee what thou shalt speak."¹ "Behold, I have appointed thee the God of Pharaoh;"² thou shalt exercise over him, not a human, but a divine power. At last Moses was convinced; he went, and performed the duty entrusted to him with the greatest success. "Moses," says St. Gregory, "fearful of his own weakness, was unwilling to go; but at last he consented, trusting in the strength of Him who commanded him."³

Confirmed
by another.

The holy Apostle St. Peter, as we read in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, was once out in his boat fishing with his companions, when they saw Christ coming towards them on the water. "Lord, if it be Thou," cried out Peter, "bid me come to Thee upon the waters."⁴ And Christ said to him: "Come!" and Peter, getting out of the boat, walked on the water as if it were dry land; but a storm arose and he got afraid: "But seeing the wind strong, he was afraid; and when he began to sink, he cried out; and immediately Jesus, stretching forth His hand, took hold of him."⁵ On another occasion Peter heard John saying that their Master was on the shore, whereupon he "cast himself into the sea."⁶ Mark the difference; on the first occasion he walked on the water, but now he goes to land by swimming, as the Venerable Bede says.⁷ But why so? If his love for Christ was so strong, his faith and confidence so great, why did he not walk on the waters on this occasion, too? If he succeeded in doing so before, and that, too, in the midst of a storm, why should he not do it now, when the sea was calm? And had he not reason enough for wishing to come as quickly as possible to where Christ was? Yes, thought Peter, the first time I was in danger of sinking, but as the Lord called me, He stretched forth His hand to save me; now He has not called me, and it would be presumption for me to expect Him to help me, so that I will swim to the shore.

Which
should en-
courage

What a beautiful lesson, my dear brethren, St. Peter gives us here. In the first instance, when Our Lord called him, he

¹ Perge igitur, et ego ero in ore tuo, doceboque te quid loquaris.—Exod. iv. 12.

² Ecce constitui te Deum Pharaonis.—Ibid. vii. 1.

³ Moyses seipsum metiendo noluit, et tamen de imperantis viribus præsumendo consensit.

⁴ Domine, si tu es, jube me ad te venire super aquas.—Matt. xiv. 28, 29.

⁵ Videns vero ventum validum, timuit, et cum coepisset mergi, clamavit; et continuo Jesus extendens manum, apprehendit eum.—Ibid. 30, 31.

⁶ Misit se in mare.—John xxi. 7.

⁷ Non intelligendum est Petrum super fluctus venisse, sed natando.

walked without hesitation on the stormy waters, and when he was in danger, he cried out with the greatest confidence, "Lord, save me;"¹ and he was helped by his Master's hand. In the same way, if God's Providence has called you to the state, office, or occupation in which you are, if you have entered on it after due deliberation with God, and with a reasonable motive, oh, then be comforted and have courage! Even if a violent storm should trouble the waters, if many dangerous occasions and temptations should assail you in that state or employment, you will not be obliged to sink; only have confidence in the almighty God; call out to Him often with Peter: Lord, save me, or I am lost! and He will stretch out His hand and help you with His grace, that you may pass safely through the danger without any injury to your own conscience. Say with David: "The Lord is my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the protector of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"² There are many others in the world, of different ages and sexes, living in all sorts of conditions and situated just as I am, and yet they keep from grievous sin with the help of God's grace; why should not I do the same, with the same grace to help me? I am one of the weakest of men, but God will make me strong, if I only co-operate with Him. Yes, O my God, I acknowledge with Thy servant Thomas a Kempis, "if left to myself I am nothing, and am filled with weakness; but if Thou but castest Thy eyes on me, I am at once strengthened."³

But we must not forget that Peter did not trust himself to walk on the water when he did not hear the voice of Christ calling him. Alas, how many there are who fail in this particular, by embracing a state of life without consideration or reflection, without invoking the assistance of the Holy Ghost, merely following their own fancies, and led on by their evil inclinations and desires; so that they enter the married state only through impure passion, or make choice of an employment through pride, ambition, or avarice, while they must often acknowledge that they are not at all capable of performing the duties they have undertaken! Is it surprising that amongst the many dangers of sin and opportunities of gratifying their evil propensities offered them by their state, they make a lamentable shipwreck

those who are called by God to a dangerous state.

While they who are not called, but rush into the danger, must ascribe their fall to themselves.

¹ Domine, salvum me fac.—Matt. xiv. 30.

² Dominus salus mea, quem timebo? Dominus protector vitæ meæ, a quo trepidabo?—Ps. xxvi. 1.

³ Si mihi ipsi relinquor, nihil sum et totus infirmitas; si autem subito me respexeris, statim fortis efficiar

of their souls? Or else, if they are called to that state by divine Providence, but go without necessity into dangerous company and occasions of sin, under the pretext of a necessity that does not exist, or of Christian charity that does not oblige them in the case, or of a duty that is only an imaginary one, and indulge in all kinds of conversations and amusements, should we be surprised to learn that they fall into a multitude of sins? Not without reason does Christ warn us: "Watch ye and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."¹ Mark well the words "that ye enter not" wantonly. Many, says St. Augustine, are neither conquered nor assailed, and yet they are sinners; for they fall into sin without inducement or temptation; sin does not offer itself to them, nor stretch out its hand to them, but they seek it themselves and go out to meet it, when they rush into the dangerous occasion.² Is it wonderful, then, that in punishment of their presumption God should withdraw His helping hand from them, even in the dangers that are incidental to their state, and allow them to fall miserably into sin? No; if you are one of those people, in vain do you expect God to help you, as we have seen already.

Both represented in a wonderful example.

Cagnolius tells us of a wonderful thing that happened in Piedmont. A dissolute soldier, who had gone some distance away from his comrades, and was walking about in a field, saw a girl on a hill herding sheep. He went up to her, but the innocent girl was afraid of him, and, as she was quite alone, and there was no one near to help her, she ran off at once and left the sheep behind her. The soldier drew his sword and pursued her, until she came to the top of a steep rock, and there was nothing left for her then but either to cast herself down and break her neck, or allow the soldier to work his wicked will on her. Either fate was hard. She reflected for a few moments as to what course she should follow, but the love of purity and the fear of offending God sank so deeply into her heart that she resolved to sacrifice her life rather than lose her virginal chastity. Abandoning herself to divine Providence, she cast herself from the rock, at the foot of which flowed a deep river. But see how God protects virtue even in extreme danger; her guardian angel bore the maiden up, so that she came down gently on the bank of the river, quite unhurt. On another occasion the same girl

¹ Vigilate et orate, ut non intretis in tentationem.—Matt. xxvi. 41.

² Sunt multi qui, ut peccent, non solum non vincuntur, sed ultro se peccato offerunt; nec expectant tentationem, sed præveniunt.—S. Aug. de vera et falsa pœnit.

was on the rock with her sheep, when she thought to herself, how easily I came down here the other day! I must try it again. And she actually leaped from the rock, but before arriving on the ground she broke her neck. She succeeded the first time, because necessity and love of holy purity compelled her to go into evident danger, and therefore she was helped by the hand of God; but the next time she was influenced only by curiosity and childish daring, and she lost her life. So it is also with us in the dangers of sin; when we go into them out of necessity and on account of the requirements of our state, with a good end in view, we may well rely on the special help of grace, but not when we wantonly seek the danger.

Yes, many a one will say, but I am so weak and frail in the occasions that are inseparable from my state that, although I do not seek any other occasions, I fall and commit sin frequently, so that I always bring the same sins to confession. But how do you manage that? Have you heard what I said in the *Plan of Discourse*? The special grace of God will help us in the dangers inseparable from our state, if we do what in us lies. "Help yourself, and God will help you," says the proverb. Do you do that? Oh, how many fail in this respect, too! They toil and moil the whole week in the state, duty, trade, or employment, in which they know they have occasions enough of sin, and yet they hardly know what spiritual weapons are, or how they are to arm themselves against temptations. They seldom go to confession or Communion; they think it enough to receive those holy sacraments once a quarter, and would that even then they received them properly. They hear nothing good for a whole week at a time, seldom read spiritual books, hardly ever think of God during the day, rarely come to a sermon, which would encourage them to do good, deter them from evil, and remind them of the duties of their state, for they come once and remain away six times; they have not a constant, earnest desire to be instructed in good; except on Sundays and holy-days, they never hear Mass, nor do they practise any morning devotions, or make the examen of conscience, or guard their senses during the day; their whole occupation, nay, their whole hearts are almost directed to temporal things. What wonder is it then, that, as such people forget God, they are forgotten by Him in turn, so that, when the occasion presents itself, they fall into sin and finally lose their souls?

All must use the proper means to guard against danger, if they do not wish to fall.

Therefore, my dear brethren, if we wish to keep ourselves al-

They must constantly

beg of God
to help
them.

ways in the friendship of God, amidst the dangers that are inseparable from our state, let us make constant use of the spiritual means that we have at hand, as I have told you on another occasion; namely, besides cautiously avoiding dangers and occasions of sin into which we are not compelled to go, let us first humbly acknowledge our own weakness, which can do nothing without the divine assistance, and then with undiminished cheerfulness often fly to God in heaven for refuge, with the firm faith and child-like confidence that our heavenly Father will not desert us. Such is the instruction that St. Augustine gives us, if we wish to lead Christian lives and to serve God without difficulty, namely, to pray, again to pray, and to pray unremittingly. "One must pray with sighs of the will, that he may obtain the gift of facility."¹ Jesus Christ encourages us to that prayer when He says: "If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him?"² "He that dwelleth in the aid of the Most High shall abide under the protection of the God of Jacob,"³ such is the assurance David gives us. Mark the words, "he that dwelleth;" not he that asks for it but once and coldly, but he that begs for it constantly and with a firm trust and confidence in God, can assure himself of the divine help. "He shall say to the Lord, Thou art my protector, and my refuge; my God, in Him will I trust. For He hath delivered me from the snare of the hunters."⁴ And David adds an express promise on the part of God, that He will not abandon one who appeals to Him in that way. "Because he hath hoped in Me, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he hath known My name."⁵ If we fall sometimes through weakness, we must not lose courage, but after humbly acknowledging and humbly repenting of our fault, begin with renewed zeal to resist our inordinate inclinations, like one who, engaged in a contest, becomes more eager for the attack when he has received a good buffet from his adversary.

And often
ask the

To the same end we must often invoke the aid of the saints in heaven, that by their powerful intercession they may obtain ef-

¹ Oret gemitu voluntatis, ut impetret donum facilitatis.—S. Aug. de perfect. just. contra Cœlest.

² Si ergo vos, cum sitis mali, nostis bona dare filiis vestris, quanto magis Pater vester de cœlo dabit spiritum bonum petentibus se?—Luke xi. 13.

³ Qui habitat in adjutorio Altissimi, in protectione Dei cœli commorabitur.—Ps. xc. 1.

⁴ Dicit Domino: susceptor meus es tu, et refugium meum; Deus meus, sperabo in eum. Quoniam ipse liberavit me de laqueo venantium.—Ibid. 2, 3.

⁵ Quoniam in me speravit, liberabo eum; protegam eum, quoniam cognovit nomen meum.—Ibid. 14.

ficacious graces for us from God to overcome all difficulties and to resist temptations. Oh, how many there are who, having almost despaired of being able to lead a pious life and to save their souls, have been so much encouraged by this means, that they overcame their evil inclinations and kept the commandments, not only without difficulty, but actually with ease! A man who had grown old in impurity thought it impossible for him to live chastely; but after he had recommended himself to the intercession of the holy Apostle St. Andrew, he never again sinned against purity. A religious at Modena, after hearing a sermon preached by St. Dominic, went to the holy man and acknowledged with tears his weakness and the great difficulty he experienced in resisting temptations to sins of the flesh. "Go," said the Saint to him; "do manfully; despair not of the immense mercy of God; I will obtain the gift of continence for you."¹ And so he did, "for he who was before unclean and impure, became chaste and pure."² Two thieves who were sentenced to the gallows were so hardened that their conversion was despaired of. St. Catherine of Siena saw them from a window as they were passing by, and beheld at the same time a great number of devils who were exulting over the unhappy wretches, in the sure hope of having them in a short time. The holy virgin begged of God to convert them, and obtained that grace for them, so that in a moment their hearts were changed, they burst out into expressions of the most sincere sorrow, offered to undergo even more severe punishments, confessed their sins, and gave up their lives joyfully by way of atonement. "They hastened to death as if they were going to a banquet, consoled by the hope that the temporal punishments they were about to suffer would be the means of admitting them all the sooner to eternal joys."³ Such is the account given by Surius in the Life of St. Catherine. An unchaste man, who was on the verge of despair, because he thought it impossible for him to give up sin, recommended himself to St. John of Nepomuc; the Saint appeared to the poor man in his sleep, and said to him that he would not commit any more sins of impurity; the man awoke, full of repentance, and during the remainder of his life never felt the least temptation. Very many who had concealed

saints to
help them.

¹ Abl, viriliter age, nihil de immensa misericordia Dei desperans: ego tibi carnis continentiam impetabo.—Surius, in vita S. Dominici.

² Qui enim antea lubricus et immundus fuerat, castus et pudicus effectus est.

³ Denique illi ad mortem non secus atque ad epulas festinant, spe bona freti, se per supplicia temporalia citius venturos ad gaudia sempiterna.—Idem, in vita S. Catherin.

some disgraceful sin in confession, and had, as they thought, an insuperable difficulty in getting the hideous burden off their consciences, had recourse to the same holy martyr, and their difficulties vanished at once, to their great surprise and consolation. Countless numbers of people have by the intercession of this Saint received great graces, and they learned by experience that it is an easy thing to lead, not merely a Christian life, but even the life of a good religious. To say nothing of others, St. Aloysius Gonzaga is famous for his power of obtaining spiritual graces. But above all let us have recourse with child-like confidence to the Mother of God, whom Christ has given us as our Mother. From her we have the greatest certainty of obtaining the grace of serving her beloved Son faithfully, and persevering in His friendship.

And arm
themselves
with the
constant re-
collection of
the presence
of God,
frequenting
the sacra-
ments, etc.

We must also accustom ourselves in all our undertakings to remember God, and not to lose sight of His presence. That we can do even in the midst of our work and of weighty occupations, by a passing thought, or a so-called aspiration. For the human will can hardly be turned to sin, before God is excluded from the memory; while, on the other hand, it is almost impossible for a good Christian, who is really desirous to save his soul, to commit a mortal sin, as long as he has a lively recollection of the presence of God. The third means is the frequent reception of the holy sacraments, for they are the channels by which divine grace flows into our souls; but more especially should we be careful to confess frequently to a learned and prudent confessor, not changing him without necessity. Nor should we omit the evening examen of conscience, in which we can see what sins and faults we have committed during the day, repent of them, and make a resolution of amendment. A garden cannot run wild when one pulls up the weeds daily; and a bad habit must be gradually got rid of when the conscience is daily cleansed and purified. The fourth means is to hear the word of God in sermons constantly, as far as possible; for, as experience teaches, that will at least fill the mind with good thoughts, and encourage and strengthen us to persevere in the divine service. The hearing of sermons is necessary, too, for those who are well educated and imagine they know all about what might be said in the sermon; for the end and object of preaching is not merely to instruct us in what we are ignorant of, but also, and especially, to move and incite us to do what we know to be advantageous for the salvation of our souls. Fi-

nally, we must be careful to give the first fruits of the morning, after we awaken from sleep, to no other but God, for to Him alone belong the first fruits of all our undertakings. Generally speaking, the manner in which we spend the day depends on how we begin it, and doubtless they who begin it by zealously performing their morning devotions may notice that during the course of the day they feel a special impulse to good, as well as consolation and spiritual joy in God during their work.

It would be well, too, after having made the good intention, to bring before one's mind the occasions of sin that are apt to arise during the day ; the places in which one has to go ; the persons he has to meet with ; the business he has to do ; the troubles and annoyances he has to contend with ; the faults and sins he generally commits ; and then to fortify his mind and will by a firm resolution, and to say to himself : I must be careful not to commit sin in this or that occasion ; I must see that I meet with meekness and charity those who are apt to contradict me, that I bear this or that cross with patience for God's sake, etc. I am prepared rather to die than offend God by sin this day. But if you break your good resolutions, for instance, if you get angry and curse, you must at once strike your breast, or say to yourself : God, be merciful to me, a sinner ! and then renew your good resolution. In order the better to carry it into effect, we must recommend it every day to God with child-like confidence : behold, O dear Lord, Thou knowest the state in which I am, the dangers and occasions of sin that surround me ; but Thou knowest, too, that I do not seek them wantonly, and Thou art well aware of my poverty and misery, and that of myself I am unable to resist temptation ; therefore Thou must help me ! Help me, then, since Thou hast promised to do so ! I will co-operate with Thee as well as I can ; clasp me in Thy fatherly and protecting arms, and let what will happen to me this day. One sole request I have to make of Thee : do not allow me to offend Thee, my heavenly Father and only and supreme Good, by a mortal sin ; but grant me to fulfil Thy holy will in all things, as far as I know it, to persevere in Thy love to the end, and to come to Thee with Thy elect in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Every morning they must renew their good resolution, and commend it to God.

For other Sermons on the same Subject, see the First Part.

*SIXTY-SECOND SERMON.***ON THE MERITS TO BE GAINED BY HIM WHO HAS TO ASSOCIATE WITH THE WICKED.****Subject.**

God makes use of His intercourse with sinners to His honor and glory ; we, too, must use to the merit and glory of our souls the intercourse which our duty obliges us to maintain with the wicked. *Preached on Sexagesima Sunday.*

Text.

Ad tempus credunt, et in tempore tentationis recedunt.—Luke viii. 13.

“They believe for a while, and in the time of temptation they fall away.”

Introduction.

Oh, how often it happens amongst Christians that the seed of the word of God falls on their hearts as on a hard rock, where it cannot take root, nor bear fruit ! It is true, they come to sermons, listen often with pleasure and satisfaction, and make the best resolutions : now I will begin to give up this bad habit ; henceforth I will never offend God deliberately, and so on ; and those resolutions are confirmed by confession and Communion. That is all very good ; and if they acted up to their resolutions, they would be sure of heaven. But, “they believe for a while ;” their goodness is only of short duration. They go amongst people as before, and when the least occasion of sin is offered them, “in the time of temptation they fall away ;” they relapse into their former sins. Such is, indeed, the case, many of you will perhaps think, my dear brethren, but who can help it ? The wicked people one has to associate with, the many occasions and dangers of sin that one’s state of life brings with it, lead one astray and compel him to sin. What? compel him ? No, you must not say that ; for if you only do what you can in company and occasions of the kind, the help of God’s special grace will not be wanting to keep you from falling so soon, as I have explained in my last sermon. But that should not be enough for you ; in that company and those occasions of sin which one’s state of life does not allow him to avoid, a good Christian

should not only find no occasion for sin, but he can and should use them as a means of gaining great merit and profit for his soul. How can he do that? you ask. In the same way in which God deals with sinners.

Plan of Discourse.

God makes use of the intercourse with sinners to His honor and glory; we, too, must use to the merit and glory of our souls the intercourse which our duty obliges us to maintain with the wicked. There you have the subject of to-day's instruction.

Do Thou, O Lord! grant us by Thy grace, which we humbly beg of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels, to imitate Thee in this particular, so that we may not be in the number of those of whom Thou sayest: "They believe for a while, and in the time of temptation they fall away."

So great and bitter is the hatred that God has of sin and of those who are in the state of sin, that, according to the teaching of theologians, if it were possible for Him to withdraw His omnipresence, by which He is always in and with all His creatures, from any place in particular, He would withdraw it from sinners. Hence St. John Chrysostom remarks that omnipresence is, indeed, one of the chief attributes and perfections of God, but it is also that attribute which, to speak of it in our human way, causes Him most trouble and annoyance; for it compels Him to remain with sinners and to have intercourse with them, although they are objects of hatred, aversion, and execration to Him. "But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike,"¹ as the Wise Man says. But, my dear brethren, if that is the case, why does not God at once destroy the sinner, since He can do so at any moment? No, such is not the way in which He acts; He preserves the sinner, and so many sinners, too; He has patience with them for years and years; He feeds and looks after them with as much care as He bestows on His beloved children. Why does He act thus?

If it is true, as St. Paul says, that God has ordained everything He has created for His own honor and glory:— "Who worketh all things according to the counsel of His will; that we may be unto the praise of His glory,"²— what glory can God

God deals with sinners and preserves them, although He hates them.

And further His honor and glory thereby.

¹ Similiter autem odio sunt Deo impius, et impietas ejus.—Wisd. xiv. 9.

² Qui operatur omnia secundum consilium voluntatis suæ; ut simus in laudem gloriæ ejus.—Ephes. i. 11, 12.

have from sinners, who dishonor Him, despise His law, and defy Him to His face; who blaspheme His holy name, and by their bad example and the scandal they give lead others into sin? Certainly, my dear brethren, He can have honor from them; for He can use the very contempt with which He is treated and the most wicked sinners as means to promote His glory, as St. Augustine says: "There is no doubt that God makes a good use of the sinner; for He would not even allow him to exist, if He could not use him for some good purpose."¹ Do you wish to know, my dear brethren, he continues, in what way even the most wicked, scandalous, and obdurate sinners in the world can contribute so wonderfully, even against their will, to the honor and glory of God? Then consider the number of men in the world who are shut out from the light of the true faith; look at the idolatrous heathens, the superstitious Turks, the hardened Jews, the rebellious heretics and schismatics; does not the God of infinite wisdom use them all to further His most important undertakings?

And uses
even the
worst sin-
ners to this
end.

"Does He not make use of the gentiles to carry out His designs?"² are the words of St. Augustine. Does He not make the gentiles serve to manifest the wonders of His grace? A heathenish world converted and changed by twelve poor fishermen, as we see it to-day; what greater proof could there be of the divine power and Providence? What greater confirmation of the evident truth of our holy religion? Does He not make use of heretics for the explanation and spread of His doctrine,³ and to strengthen us in the one, true Catholic faith, in which alone salvation can be found? Never is the truth of that faith better investigated, or more clearly proved and brought to the light of day, than when it is attacked and opposed by different errors and heresies; and generally speaking, never do Catholics show more zeal in defending their religion, than when they have to live in the midst of heretics. Does He not make use of schisms and disunion as means and instruments to make evident the indestructible solidity of His Church, foretold by Jesus Christ, so that the gates of hell shall never prevail against her?⁴ In spite of many schisms the body of the Church still remains in its substantial unity under the one head on earth, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, while we know from experience that sects and heresies

¹ Ille utique peccatore bene utitur, qui nec eum esse permetteret, si illo uti non posset.

² Nonne utitur gentibus ad materiam operationis suæ?

³ Hæreticis ad probationem doctrinæ suæ?

⁴ Schismaticis ad documentum stabilitatis suæ?

change and decay constantly. The Jews, that unhappy remnant of the once chosen people of God, scattered as they are through the world, without king, priest, temple, or head, are they not, even against their will, living proofs that Jesus Christ is the true Messiah and Saviour of the world, and that His prophecies with regard to their dispersion have been fulfilled up to the present day? What have the tyrants and persecutors of the Christian name effected? The very means they made use of to destroy the Christians have only added to their number, given martyrs to Christ, filled His Church with saints and heaven with elect. And all the other sinners in the world, no matter how numerous they are, serve to make known to men the perfections of the Lord God; they are instruments by which the erring are chastised, and the pious proved; they are proofs of His wonderful goodness, mercy, patience, and fatherly love, since He bears with them so long; they will be proofs, too, if they are not converted, of His strict justice; for they will feel for all eternity, in the fire of hell, what a great God, worthy of all fear and love, they have offended. Therefore it is true that God makes use of sinners and their wickedness to further His honor and glory.

And there, too, you have an example of how we are to act with wicked and dangerous companions. For we must fly and avoid them as well as we can; but if our state of life and our duty compel us to have intercourse with them, we must use them in the same way as God does, for the profit and advantage of our souls. We have abundant opportunities of doing this every day, although we may not seek them; for, as St. Ambrose says, as His toleration of sinners serves the Lord God to make known His perfections, so our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked must serve us in the practice of the chief virtues. If, for instance, I have to live with people whose conduct occasions me much annoyance, either because I have a natural dislike for them, or because they maliciously persecute and trouble me, what a splendid opportunity I have there for the practice of Christian patience and mortification! If I have to live with obstinate, passionate, and hot-tempered people, what a grand opportunity I have for practising Christian meekness! If they contradict me, or vent their ill-humor on me, can I not give them an example of Christian charity by returning good for evil, as I am bound to do? If they are proud and puffed-up, and conform more to worldly vanities than I do, I can learn Christian humility and modesty, according to the example of Our

We, too, should use our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked to increase in virtue.

Lord, who was as the least of men on earth. If they are given to gluttony and drunkenness, I can learn from their excesses how odious those vices are, and how necessary it is to practise Christian sobriety and temperance. If I hear them cursing, swearing, blaspheming, detracting from their neighbor's good fame, that hellish language should teach me to restrain my tongue, and be more fervent in blessing the holy name of God. If they give me occasion for sins of impurity by their flatteries, caresses, unchaste talk, scandalous behavior, or indecent dress, I am compelled to mortify my eyes and other senses, and to fly to God for refuge by humble prayer, that I may not be overcome by temptation. If they are addicted to many vices that I cannot prevent or induce them to amend of, they compel me to acknowledge with gratitude the special graces and benefits that God has conferred on me, since He has preserved me, in preference to so many others, from those sins; for, according to the testimony of St. Augustine, without those graces I should be just as bad as they are; they force me to know myself and humbly to confess my own weakness, so that I am obliged to walk more cautiously, lest I should fall into the vices that I see others addicted to, as St. Paul says: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."¹ They compel me to be more zealous in the service of God, partly in order to atone for the insults offered Him by the greater number of men in the world, and partly to obtain His help and special assistance in so many occasions and dangers of sin. Therefore, if I am in earnest about seeking the salvation and advantage of my soul, the very occasions of evil which my duty or occupation throws in my way will become for me the best opportunities of advancing in the chief Christian virtues.

It requires
no great
virtue to
be good
amongst the
good.

Nay, the holy Pope St. Gregory ventures to say that, in the ordinary course of things, no one can practise true virtue, or, at all events, practise it perfectly, unless he is now and then by divine decree forced to live amongst the wicked. For, how could a man know whether he has a virtue or not, if nothing occurs to prove and try him? There is no great art required to be patient amongst the patient, where there is no one to contradict you; nor to be meek amongst the meek, where no one says a word to displease you; nor to be charitable amongst the charitable, where you receive kindness from every one; nor to be temperate amongst the temperate, where there is no occasion given for in-

¹ Qui se existimat stare, videat ne cadat.—I. Cor. x. 12.

temperance; nor to be humble amongst the humble, where there is no example of pride or worldly vanity; nor to be chaste amongst the chaste, where that virtue is never assailed by any temptation. In a word, what great art is required to be pious amongst the pious, where one incites the other by his example to lead a holy life? Truly, it would be a desirable thing for all the inhabitants of a town to be united in that way in God, to be of one heart and soul, and to work together to serve their God zealously; but in that case, virtue, since it would have no combat to sustain, would not deserve to be called heroic, nor would it be so meritorious, or gain such a great reward.

But on the other hand, to have to live and deal with wicked, sinful men, whose vices are daily before our eyes, and yet, in the midst of them, to be so constant and steadfast, with the help of God's grace, that we have no part in their wickedness, that we always resist and oppose their solicitations to evil, not allowing either their promises or threats, their flatteries or caresses, the ridicule or the annoyance they subject us to, to get the better of us and to lead us into sin; to have the example of more than half the world before us, who make a common practice of sinful abuses, and yet to set aside all human respect, utterly disregarding what others do or say, and their remarks and sarcasms, and not to depart a hair's breadth from the principles that Jesus Christ inculcates in His Gospel; it is in that, that real, heroic, and praiseworthy virtue consists; that it is which proves that we love God above all things. The climax of wickedness in the sinner is, according to the testimony of the Prophet Isaias, to be wicked amongst the good and pious: "In the land of the saints he hath done wicked things, and he shall not see the glory of the Lord,"¹ nor will he be admitted into the land of the elect. What a terrible fate! From this it may be inferred that the perfection of justice and the greatest holiness consist in being and remaining pious amongst the wicked.

Virtue is best proved in the society of the wicked.

Moses, in a heathen, idolatrous court, in spite of all the efforts of the magicians, and all the threats of the king, did not swerve an iota from what God had appointed for him to do. A Tobias in the midst of idolaters, "when all went to the golden calves, which Jeroboam, king of Israel, had made . . . alone fled the company of all, and went to Jerusalem, to the temple of the Lord, and there adored the Lord God of Israel, offering faith-

The best proof of perfect virtue is to be good amongst the wicked.

¹ In terra sanctorum iniqua gessit, et non videbit gloriam Domini.—Isa. xxvi. 10.

fully all his first fruits and his tithes.”¹ A Louis on the throne of France knows nothing of the pomps and vanities of the world, and a soldier, amidst the tumult and dangers of war, keeps God always before his eyes, so that he never consents to a grievous sin. That man, in the course of his business or occupation, which compels him to associate with all kinds of people, amongst whom are avaricious, selfish, unjust, faithless, dishonest, and deceitful characters, who try to enrich themselves by unlawful practices, keeps his hands clean from all injustice, and will rather lose all he has than go against his conscience. That woman in her household, in which there is little fear of God, where the name of God is seldom heard, but that of the devil often in oaths and imprecations, ill-treated by her passionate, drunken, or adulterous husband, laughed at by her disobedient children or her obstinate servants, is and remains patient, meek, submissive to the will of God, and always satisfied with the cross He has laid on her shoulders, heavy as it is; while, in spite of all her troubles and trials, she never omits to urge her children and servants, as well as she can, to serve God. That other woman, often requested by her neighbors and friends, who give her the example, to join them in going to parties, or in paying unnecessary visits, or in leading an idle, useless life, never allows herself to be persuaded to waste her precious time as they do. That young girl, although she sees nearly every one else of her age following the vain, luxurious, and scandalous customs of the world, keeps strictly to the humble law of Jesus Christ, in spite of what may be said or thought of her, or of the ridicule that may be heaped on her. That young man, who is invited by his comrades to go with them to the ale-house, or to associate with dangerous companions amidst the amusements of Shrove-tide, cannot be induced to have anything to do with them. There you have a sure sign of real, solid virtue.

That virtue is most prized by Our Lord.

These are they whom Jesus Christ praises so highly, as He formerly did His disciples: “And you are they who have continued with Me in My temptations.”² While others, with whom you have to associate, have abandoned Me, while they have been ashamed of Me and My example, and have sworn fidelity to the world and its perverse laws, despising My commands, you have been My true servants, who have remained constantly at

¹ Cum irent omnes ad vitulos aureos, quos Jeroboam fecerat, rex Israel, hic solus fugiebat consortia omnium, sed pergebat in Jerusalem. ad templum Domini, et ibi adorabat Dominum Deum Israel, omnia primitiva sua et decimas suas fideliter offerens. — Tob. i. 5, 6.

² Vos autem estis, qui permanistis mecum in temptationibus meis. — Luke xxi. 28.

My side, following Me and My doctrine in spite of human respect. To remain with Me when there is nothing to suffer for My sake, when there is nothing to take you away from Me, when everything combines to incite hearts to love Me, that is an easy and a common virtue. But to stand steadfastly at My side and be My faithful servants in the midst of temptations and dangers, so that one must overcome himself in many things; to remain with Me, when one must constantly fight and gain the victory; to remain with Me in spite of contradictions, ridicule, and sarcasm, that is what I look on as real fidelity, as true love and friendship, as heroic constancy; and that is the virtue that I have promised to reward in a special manner. "You are they who have continued with Me in My temptations: and I dispose to you as My Father hath disposed to Me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom."¹ Would you ever have imagined, my dear brethren, that the otherwise so dangerous intercourse and conversation with the wicked could be so profitable and advantageous for the salvation, so meritorious for the soul of the just man, who really means to serve God to the best of his ability?

But, alas! what happens most frequently? As a general rule, we invert the order of things, and of the means of salvation and sanctification we make a stumbling block, over which we often lamentably fall and hurt ourselves. The intention of divine Providence is, that our intercourse with the wicked, when our state of life does not allow us to avoid it, should serve to sanctify our souls and to increase our virtue; but we, generally speaking, allow it to pervert us, so that we become worse on account of it; we howl with the wolves that surround us, and according to the laws of the world. Monkeys are sometimes caught in a ludicrous manner: the hunter goes into the forest where those animals are to be found, bringing with him a number of boots, large and small; these he scatters about under the trees, and then takes one of them up and puts it on his foot, and another on his arm. This he does until he sees that he has attracted the attention of the monkeys, when, knowing their curiosity and love of imitation, he leaves the boots there and goes a short distance away. By-and-by the monkeys come down from the tree and begin to imitate the hunter; they take up the boots and pull them on, one on his arm, another on his feet; all wish to be

Generally speaking, we become perverted with the wicked, instead of making a good use of them.

¹ Et ego dispono vobis, sicut disposuit mihi Pater meus regnum, ut edatis et bibatis super mensam meam in regno meo.—Luke xxii. 29, 30.

booted. But what is fun to the hunter is death to them. The boots are filled inside with bird-lime, which sticks to the hair on the legs and arms of the monkeys, and thus holds them fast; when they try to stand up, they fall down again, and the more they struggle, the tighter the bird-lime holds them. After a time the hunter comes up, and when he has laughed his fill at their antics, he puts chains on the foolish animals and leads them away. Are we not monkeys of that kind, my dear brethren, when we are so ready to imitate others, so apt to pick up bad habits from the wicked, and so thoughtless as not to consider what the result of that mode of action must be? We quarrel with the quarrelsome, curse with the profane, indulge in invective with the contumelious, drink to excess with drunkards, gamble with gamesters, dance with dancers; we do without hesitation what we see others doing; we speak as they speak; nay, mere fashion and custom has in our eyes the power of making everything lawful. Thus, while God furthers His honor and glory by bearing with sinners, we seek in our intercourse with them a cause of our ruin and eternal damnation. That intercourse should be to us a means of becoming better and of increasing in virtue; but we take occasion from it to become worse and more vicious, and thus, like the monkeys, we fall into the snare of the hellish hunter, who drags us off as his prisoners and slaves. Would to God that this were not too true!

Deplorable
the folly of
those who
make their
state of life
an occasion
of sin.

It gives me the heart-ache to hear a man complain of his state of life or employment, trying thereby to palliate and excuse his faults and sins, and saying that one cannot be other than bad when one has to live with wicked people. Nor does it cause me less pain to hear a woman lamenting her sad condition, and pretending that the greater number of her sins can be attributed to the drunken, ill-tempered, dissolute husband with whom she has to live. What must I say to such people? I pity them, indeed, not on account of the unhappy state of which they complain, for it is that in which they are placed by divine Providence, but on account of the bad use they make of it, contrary to God's will and intention; for the means that should serve to increase their merits and further their salvation they pervert into an instrument of their own ruin. I pity the woman, not because she has so much trouble and misery to suffer, but because she bears so badly the cross that is laid on her shoulders, inasmuch as she either does not know, or does not consider that her ill-conditioned husband is a cross imposed on her by the inscrutable de-

crees of divine Providence, to serve her as a ladder by which to ascend to eternal joys. Now, since such is the case, and it is the teaching of theologians, is it not a deplorable fact that there should be men who suffer and suffer daily the annoyances that arise from such intercourse, while all their suffering is without the least profit or advantage for their souls, since they turn a wholesome medicine into a deadly poison, and pervert the benefits of God into a constant occasion of sin, and thus, as a necessary consequence, leave the sufferings of this life only to go into the eternal torments of the next? Is not that a fact, I ask, that should be deplored with tears of blood?

Still more do I grieve, nor can I always restrain my displeasure, when I hear some, on being exhorted to give up this or that sinful custom, say, in the words of the Prophet *Isaias*: "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people that hath unclean lips."¹ That is, they appeal at once to the example of others, and to the custom of the world. I speak and act in this or that way, they say, but I cannot do otherwise, for I am living amongst people who speak and act in that way; what others of my condition do, I must do also. If they amend, then I will follow their example. What answer could I make to such people? I might tell them to amend their lives, and thus to give the lie to the hackneyed saying, "every one does it;" for then others could see that they, at least, were exceptions. I might say to them, in the words of *St. Peter*: "Having your conversation good among the gentiles," amongst those of your own condition; "for so is the will of God, that by doing well you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."² But my words would have little effect on them, so that there is nothing left for me but to bewail their folly and blindness, in misusing a grand opportunity of showing their fidelity and love to God, and in turning it into an occasion of dishonoring Him all the more, of despising His holy law, and of helping to make vice more common and shameless by imitating the example, as they say, of others like themselves; so that, instead of following with the small number of the elect the narrow path traced by Christ, that leads to heaven, they prefer to go with the majority on the broad road that leads to everlasting ruin.

Still more
that of those
who follow
sinful cus-
toms.

¹ Vir pollutus labiis ego sum, et in medio populi polluta labia habentis ego habito.—*Isa.* vi. 5.

² Conversationem vestram inter gentes habentes bonam; quia sic est voluntas Dei, ut benefacientes obmutescere faciatis imprudentium hominum ignorantiam.—*1. Pet.* ii. 12, 15.

There will
be no excuse
for either
before the
• divine
Judge.

O divine Judge, who wilt search with a lantern every idle word, every act committed through ignorance, nay, even the justices of Thy pious servants on the last great day, shall we be able to palliate our sins in Thy sight by alleging as an excuse for them that the dangers we had to contend with in our state of life were too great and manifold; that we only followed the example of the majority; that we could not under the circumstances avoid sin; that we had to do as they did with whom we associated? Alas, that feeble excuse will only make our malice all the more evident, and our damnation all the deeper! For Thou wilt show to us the arrangements of Thy all-wise Providence, and wilt prove beyond contradiction that the very circumstances in which Thou didst place us were so many graces and helps to attain true virtue and to increase our merit in heaven, while we shall have to acknowledge that we have accepted those means from Thee, and have misused them to ruin our souls and to offend Thee more grievously by rejecting Thy inspirations, neglecting Thy graces for fear of mortification and of the cross; or through human respect, in order to please people or through fear of displeasing them, dreading what they might say of us!

They will
be put to
shame by
others.

And what shall we have to say at Thy judgment-seat, when an Abraham, a Lot, a Job, who lived amongst Chaldeans, Sodomites, and in the land of Hus, shall rise up against us? They and countless others will condemn us. I have lived, Abraham will say, amongst idolaters, but I have always adored the true God; I have lived in the midst of a people who were addicted to the most shameful forms of impurity, Lot will exclaim, but I never violated conjugal chastity; I have lived with men who were worse than wild beasts, Job will say, and yet I led a holy life. And that life we led without having preachers to exhort us to avoid vice, or to encourage us to practise virtue; we had no pious pictures to arouse our devotion, no sacraments so perfect as to bring down abundant graces on our souls. But you, Christians, to whom the word of God was so often and so impressively preached to spur you on to lead holy lives; who had daily before your eyes the example of so many pious souls; who were provided with real sacraments to strengthen you against all attacks, you have not had the courage to prefer for your souls' sake the will of God, although you knew well what it was, to the custom of a few men. It is no excuse for you that you had to live amongst wicked people. What shall we say when an Agnes, a Lucy, an Agatha, and

so many other innocent and holy virgins shall appear against us? What? they will exclaim; you put forward the dangers of the state in which you had to live as a palliation for your sins? Neither caresses, nor promises, nor threats were spared to induce us to sin against holy purity; nay, we actually had to suffer violence; but still we were able with the help of God to overcome all the attacks that were made on us, and to preserve our chastity untarnished. Why could you not have done the same in the far lesser dangers to which you were exposed? What answer shall we make when a Nicætas, a Thomas of Aquin, a Pelagius, and so many other holy youths shall appear against us, of whom the first was bound hand and foot and was thus exposed to the attacks of a shameless woman; having no other means of defence, he bit off his tongue and spit it in her face; the second drove away with a fire-brand a woman who had come to tempt him; while the third, then a youth of thirteen years of age, having been taken prisoner by the Saracens, and kept in confinement for three years, at last attracted the notice of the king, Abdarrahan, who, enticed by his beauty, endeavored to caress and fondle him; but the holy youth, indignant at such treatment, and not fearing either the majesty or power of the king, drew back his hand and gave him a blow in the face, crying out at the same time: I am a Christian! I would rather suffer any torment (and he was afterwards put to a cruel death) than allow myself to be dishonored by your caresses! What? they will say; we were able to fight and to conquer in such great and extreme danger, and you have not been able to resist a flattering word, a laughing eye, or a caressing demeanor? You were obliged to sin, because others of the same condition gave you the example of it, although they never offered you the least violence, and you followed the custom of the world solely to be like others? How can you imagine that the state in which you had to live will excuse your shortcomings?

O my God, I am struck dumb, and am filled with confusion at those reproofs which I so richly deserve! Alas, I cannot conceal my guilt from Thee, who searchest the reins and the heart, nor from my own conscience, which convicts me. I acknowledge with sorrow of heart that I have sinned, that I have too easily allowed myself to be led astray in the past. I have tried to throw the blame of my sins on my state of life, on the people with whom I have had to live, on my own weakness and frailty, as if I could not overcome the temptations to which I was ex-

Repentant
acknowledgment of
the faults
committed
in this re-
spect, and
purpose of
amendment.

posed, and on the perverse judgments of the vain world, that tried to convince me that good was evil, and evil good. But now I confess that all these excuses will be of no avail before Thy judgment-seat, but will rather make things worse for me. It is not my state that is to blame, for in it I could have kept Thy commandments and performed the duties imposed on me by Thee; nor the example of other men, which I should not have followed; nor my own weakness, for which Thou hadst prepared the help of Thy special graces, if I had only been willing to work with them, as I should have done; nor the customs and usages of the world, for I had the maxims and principles of Thy holy Gospel, that I might easily have learned and understood, if I had wished. None of all these things can justify me in Thy sight, for it was my own slothful, unmortified, and wicked will that was the sole cause of the sins I have committed. I confess humbly to Thee, in the words of Thy servant David, who expresses exactly the miserable state of my soul. "My soul is filled with evils; and my life hath drawn nigh to hell."¹ The cause of my soul was almost lost, and I was amongst the number of those who go down to eternal torments: "I am counted among them that go down into the pit."² I was like one who had no help to expect, and was already looked on as dead, although I could have risen out of the grave if I had wished: "I am become as a man without help, free among the dead."³ Nor did that happen to me because Thou didst refuse me Thy help, or deprive me of my freedom; but, as I must confess to my own shame, because I did not use Thy help and my freedom to lead a better life; because I preferred to remain amongst the dead, rather than to rise and be with the living, "free among the dead." I was not a whit better off than those who, having received a mortal wound, are lying dead in their graves, whom Thou dost not intend to help any more, and who are rejected by Thee; not, indeed, O my God, because Thou wert not willing to help me, but because I did not wish to avail myself of the assistance Thou wert ready to give me, since I preferred to be with those who are lying in the grave of sin: "Like the slain sleeping in the sepulchres, whom Thou rememberest no more; and they are cast off from Thy hand."⁴ And what was

¹ Repleta est malis anima mea, et vita mea inferno appropinquavit.—Ps. lxxvii. 4.

² Æstimatus sum cum descendentibus in lacum.—Ibid. 5.

³ Factus sum sicut homo sine adjutorio, inter mortuos liber.—Ibid. 5, 6.

⁴ Sicut vulnerati dormientes in sepulchris, quorum non es memor amplius, et ipsi de manu tua repulsi sunt.—Ibid. 6.

the end of it all with me? I was in the midst of those who had already fallen, and I allowed them to drag me down with them: "They have laid me in the lower pit; in the dark places and in the shadow of death."¹ All this misery I can attribute only to my own malice. Therefore, O my God, since I now know the truth, I will be more careful for the future in this respect, and will use the dangerous company and occasions that my state obliges me to frequent, and that I cannot avoid according to Thy decree, for the good of my soul, as Thou usest them for the furthering of Thy honor and glory. But I now acknowledge that Thy powerful help and grace is necessary for me, in order to enable me not to be perverted by bad example, wicked proposals, sinful conversation, or unlawful customs; and for that grace I ask Thee most earnestly in the words of Thy servant David, "Keep me from the snare which they have laid for me, and from the stumbling-blocks of them that work iniquity."² If Thou favorest me with Thy protection, I shall have courage to oppose single-handed, when necessary, bad example with an edifying life; and if the whole world were on that account to turn me into ridicule, and make sport of me as a fool, yet I will not cease to be faithful to Thy service as long as I live, until, having happily escaped all dangers and overcome all temptations, I shall find myself in safety with Thee, where there shall be neither fear, nor danger, nor occasion of sin for all eternity. Amen.

SIXTY-THIRD SERMON.

**ON GIVING EDIFICATION TO OTHERS, IN OUR UNAVOIDABLE
INTERCOURSE WITH THE WICKED.**

Subject.

Just as God makes use of His dealings with sinners for their conversion and amendment, so should we, too, in our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked, seek to edify others and give them good example.—*Preached on the first Sunday in Lent.*

¹ Posuerunt me in lacu inferiori: in tenebris, et in umbra mortis.—Ps. lxxxvii. 7.

² Custodi me a laqueo, quem statuerunt mihi, et a scandalis operantium iniquitatem.—Ibid. cxl. 9.

Text.

Omnis plebs ut vidit, dedit laudem Deo.—Luke xviii. 43.

“And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.”

Introduction.

Christ, the Son of God, knew well what was to happen to Him in a short time in the city of Jerusalem, amongst the wicked Jews; for He had foretold it to His disciples: “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things shall be accomplished which were written by the prophets concerning the Son of man; for He shall be delivered to the gentiles, and shall be mocked and scourged and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will put Him to death.” Why, then, did He not remain away? Nay, why did He make such haste to go to Jerusalem? So great was His love for all men, and His desire to save them from hell by dying a painful and disgraceful death, that, while He was on the way to Jericho, He converted a great number and impelled them to praise God, by miraculously giving sight to a blind man: “And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.” Here again, my dear brethren, we have a pattern and example of the use we should make of those bad companions and occasions of sin that our state of life does not permit us to avoid. The almighty God makes use of His dealings with sinners to further His own honor and glory, and we, too, should use our intercourse with them for the good of our souls, as we have seen in the last sermon. Now I say further—

Plan of Discourse.

Just as God makes use of His dealings with sinners for their conversion and amendment, so should we, too, in our unavoidable intercourse with the wicked, do our best to edify others and give them good example. Such is the subject of to-day's instruction.

Give us all Thy powerful grace to this end, O God! We ask it of Thee through the intercession of Thy most holy Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels, that all who in future see how we live may take therefrom occasion to love and praise Thee.

The combat
between
two angels
teaches us
to deal
with men
as God does.

The Holy Scripture mentions in a few words a remarkable combat, when it gives a description of the vision seen by the Prophet Daniel. This combat took place between two angels, and not, as the Abbot Rupert thinks, between a good angel and a bad one, but, according to the interpretation of St. Jerome

and of the other holy Fathers, between two good angels, who are constantly adoring God in heaven and attending on Him. "The prince of the kingdom of Persians," said one of them to Daniel, "resisted me one and twenty days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me;" and again he said: "And now I will return to fight against the prince of the Persians."¹ The first was the guardian angel and protector of the Jewish nation; he wished to bring the people entrusted to his charge at once out of Persia, so as to save them from the danger of being led into idolatry. The other angel, the guardian of Babylon, resisted him and begged of God not to allow the Jews to leave Babylon, but rather to keep them there, that by their pious and edifying lives they might convert the Babylonians to the true religion; and in fact, we read in the Book of Esdras that some time afterwards three Persian kings renounced idolatry and adored the true God. What does this contest between the angels signify, my dear brethren? A twofold expression of the divine will, answers the holy Pope St. Gregory, by which God commands us to avoid the society of the wicked, and also to remain in it; both these commands are given under certain conditions, and therefore they do not contradict each other. For, God commands us to avoid the company of the wicked, on account of the danger of being perverted, when necessity or decency does not oblige us to go into it. And this is signified by the efforts of the first angel to have the Jews removed from Babylon. But when duty renders it necessary for us to have intercourse with the wicked, so that we cannot avoid them, then God commands us to help as far as we can in converting them and saving their souls; and this is what is signified by the efforts of the second angel.

Here, too, we must imitate the manner in which God acts in bearing with sinners and wicked men in this life. He is so good that He is not satisfied with merely preserving their lives, being present with them at all times, in all places, even when they are offending and insulting Him, and with making His patience in bearing with them serve to further His honor and glory; but His wish and desire is, and many are the means He uses to carry it into effect, to bring them to see the unhappy state in which they are, to repent of their sins, be converted to Him

God, in
patiently
bearing
with sinners,
seeks their
conversion.

¹ *Princeps autem regni Persarum restitit mihi viginti et uno diebus; et ecce Michael, unus de principibus primis, venit in adiutorium meum. . . Et nunc revertar, ut procler adversum principem Persarum.*—Dan. x. 18, 20.

with their whole hearts, and thus be saved. Such is the end of the inspirations that He gives them sometimes immediately, sometimes by the holy angels; of the words that He places in the mouths of preachers and confessors, to exhort them to give up their vicious habits; of the promises of complete pardon, by which He assures them that He will forgive all their sins without exception, if with contrite heart they make an earnest purpose of amendment; of the terrible threats of a sudden and unprovided death, a strict judgment, and eternal punishment, if they continue in their vicious mode of life; of the bitter sting of remorse, which gnaws at them day and night; of the many benefits He bestows on them constantly, in spite of their wickedness; of the wonderful patience He shows in tolerating them for so many years, that the thought of those benefits may move them, if they have any sense of decency left, to cease offending so good a God; of the sickness, misfortune, death, poverty and want, humiliation, troubles, and other crosses by which He sometimes chastises them, that, becoming wise in the school of adversity, they may enter into themselves, open their eyes, and leave the state of sin. Thus the wisdom, goodness, justice, providence, and nearly all the perfections of God are constantly employed for the advantage, conversion, and salvation of sinners. And what should surprise us most of all, He employs the same trouble and care for the good of those who, as He has foreseen from all eternity, will reject the means of salvation He offers them, continue in their evil ways, and be lost forever; and He acts towards them as if He did not know that they would not profit by His goodness to them.

We, too, must seek the conversion of the wicked when we have to associate with them.

There is the example that God gives us, and at the same time it explains what a Christian's duty is, a duty that is unfortunately ignored by so many. For in the society and intercourse with the wicked, which we cannot avoid, we must seek, not merely the advantage of our own souls, but we must also endeavor, as far as we can, to convert others and bring them to God. Such is the obligation incumbent on every Christian, no matter what may be his state, occupation, or condition; and it is an obligation that specially binds people in certain states of life.

Some men are under a special obligation to this effect.

And with regard to this latter assertion, that certain people are bound in a special manner to work for the conversion and amendment of others, there is no one who will call it into question. For, tell me, whose duty is it to keep in order and to chastise a disobedient, dissolute, drunken, and wicked son? Who is bound

to undertake that task, if not his own father? If a vain young girl spends her time in idleness, sitting at the window or standing at the door in order to see the passers-by and be seen by them; if she sleeps till late in the day, and hardly knows how to do anything but trick herself out in the latest fashion; if she is far too familiar with persons of the opposite sex, and prefers frequenting balls and parties, taking part in the amusements of Shrove-tide, paying visits, and spending her time in dancing and amusing herself, to hearing the word of God in sermons and going often to the sacraments; who is bound to instruct her, to make her give up those vanities, to keep her at home, and to occupy her with some work suited to her condition, if not her mother? And if the latter neglects to perform this duty, who is bound to correct and to punish both, if not the father, again? If the servants and other members of the household are given to cursing and swearing; if they are ignorant in many things that concern their eternal salvation; if they are known to maintain improper intimacies, either in the house or in the neighborhood: who must endeavor to make them give up that hellish language, or that impure passion, and to urge them to learn the Christian doctrine, and to instill into them the fear and love of God? Who, if not their master and mistress, to whose care God has entrusted them for that very end? Who is bound to repress public abuses in a town or community, but those superiors who have received authority from God to that effect? No one, I repeat, can doubt that in all those cases there is a special obligation to work for the salvation of others.

But, alas, where is this zeal for souls to be found in the proper measure? They who should correct others are sometimes the very ones to give them bad example. The father, who should correct his drunken son, is himself addicted to drink; the mother, who should reprove her vain daughter, goes with her to balls and parties, is just as eager in following the fashions, and leads just as idle a life; or, if she is too old to do that, she commands her daughter to follow the customs of the vain world. The master and mistress, who should correct their servants' faults, are as bad themselves; they curse and swear, and are seldom to be found hearing a sermon, or assisting at public devotions. But in nearly every other matter where there is a fault to be re-proved, there is no want of zeal, and on the least provocation expression is given to it. If the son is somewhat awkward in company, or the daughter careless in dress, and unable to follow

But they
very often
neglect it.

the customs of polite society; if she is too stiff and formal in company, which is much more becoming a young girl than a too great freedom of manner; if the servants do not do all they are told, or if they happen to break a dish or a jug, etc.; oh, then there is zeal enough in parents and masters! Then there are sharp words enough to reprove such faults, and means enough of punishing them. But when the fault is one that concerns only the divine service, and the salvation of an immortal soul, it is overlooked, as if it were of no account, nor is the least trouble taken to amend it. Alas, what a strict account such people will have to render for having been so careless of an obligation that, as they know well, God has imposed on them, of helping in the conversion and salvation of those subject to them! But enough of this, as I have spoken of it frequently already.

The law of charity binds all in general to help their neighbors to amend.

I intend speaking to-day chiefly of the general obligation incumbent on all men, no matter what may be their state of life or condition, to work as well as they can for the conversion of the wicked with whom they are compelled to associate. There is no one in the world, says the wise Ecclesiasticus, whom God has not obliged in some way or other to look after his neighbor's salvation: "And he gave to every one of them commandment concerning his neighbor."¹ How is that? Because there is no one in the world who is not bound by the precept of Christian charity to help his neighbor when he can, and from that springs the general obligation, binding on all, of assisting the poor and needy according to one's means. Now, if the law of charity binds every one to show mercy and charity to the poor in their temporal wants, how much more does not the same law oblige each one to show mercy and compassion to sinners in their spiritual necessities! And if we cannot, without sinning against the law of charity towards God and our neighbor, refuse to help him who is in want in those things that concern his body and this mortal life, can we be said to satisfy the requirements of that law, if by our carelessness or indifference we allow the immortal souls of our brethren, purchased so dearly by the precious blood of Christ, to go to ruin?

Shown by an example by way of simile.

We are told of a young man in Jerusalem who, having taken unawares some food from a witch, lost the appearance of a man, and assumed that of an ass. While thus transformed, he still retained his reason, but lost the power of speech, so that he

¹ Mandavit illis unicuique de proximo suo.—Ecclesi. xvii. 12.

heard everything that was said in his presence, but was not able to make known who he was. The first who drove him away were his own former comrades. He made several attempts to enter houses and to stretch out his front hoofs, as if they were hands, to implore help; but he was always looked on as a stupid beast and was driven from the door with blows. For three years he continued in this state, and had to carry heavy burdens on his back. One day he happened to pass by a church, in which the priest was just elevating the sacred Host; the miserable wretch fell on his knees, in spite of the load he was carrying, and made every sign of adoring God, so that those who saw him might at least suspect that he was a human being under the influence of witchcraft. Nor was he disappointed; for his mistress took charge of him and after a diligent examination found out the whole story. The witch was burnt alive, and the young man recovered his former appearance. Suppose now, my dear brethren, that some one knew the supposed ass to be a human being, and had the power of easily restoring him to shape again, but refused to take the trouble of doing so, would you not look on that man as most unmerciful and cruel? Now, there is no witchcraft that can cause such a hideous transformation in the body, as mortal sin causes in the soul; nay, the Holy Scripture speaks of sinners as animals, beasts of burden. "I am become as a beast before Thee,"¹ says the penitent David, comparing himself to a horse or a mule. "Do not become like the horse and the mule, that have no understanding,"² such is the warning he gives to all to deter them from sin; and speaking in the person of Jesus Christ, surrounded by the wicked Jews, he calls them calves, bulls, lions, and dogs: "Many calves have surrounded me: fat bulls have besieged me."³ "They have opened their mouths against me, as a lion ravening and roaring; many dogs have encompassed me."⁴ Oh, what horrible monsters we should behold, if we could see the souls of those who are in the state of mortal sin, and if the outward aspect of their bodies corresponded to their spiritual deformity! How many proud, angry, raging lions; how many unchaste and impure bulls; how many dissolute and wanton calves; how many envious dogs; how many gluttonous wolves, filthy swine,

¹ *Ut jumentum factus sum apud te.*—Ps. lxxii. 23.

² *Nolite fieri sicut equus et mulus, quibus non est intellectus.*—Ibid. xxxi. 9.

³ *Circumdederunt me vituli multi: tauri pingues obsederunt me.*—Ibid. xxi. 13.

⁴ *Aperuerunt super me os suum, sicut leo rapiens et rugiens. Circumdederunt me canes multi.*—Ibid. 14, 17.

foul goats, and stupid and slothful asses, who are careless in the service of God! And, Christians, should not such a lamentable spectacle touch our hearts! Shall we unmercifully refuse to help, as far as we can, to free our brethren from that loathsome transformation? Nay, what is of far greater importance, should we not do our utmost to save their souls from eternal death, from the flames of hell, and to bring them back to the right path, by which they may arrive at the everlasting joys of heaven! If we refuse to do that, where is even a spark of charity to be found in us? How could we say that our hearts are those of reasoning men?

All can do
that by fra-
ternal cor-
rection.

But it is in our power to perform that act of charity towards our neighbor. "My brethren," says the Apostle St. James, in his Epistle, "if any of you err from the truth, and one convert him, he must know that he who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way shall save his soul from death."¹ Amongst the sinners and wicked people with whom we have daily to associate, says St. Augustine, there are many who, as God foresees, will be in the number of the elect, provided other men help them to be converted, while, if that help and zeal on the part of others is wanting to them, they will be lost forever. Now we do not know who those sinners are, nor do they know themselves how they will fare in the next life; for the good and bad, the elect and the reprobate, are so mixed up together in this life, that we cannot distinguish them from each other. For this reason, then, our charity must be general, and our zeal for souls, as far as possible, must be extended to all men, that they whom God perhaps wishes to convert by our means and to bring to heaven may not be defrauded by us of the means that God has prepared to save their souls. Therefore St. Paul so often warns the faithful to give a good example to the heathens and idolaters with whom they had to live; and he praises the Corinthians for having done much good in that way: "Your emulation hath provoked very many."² The Apostle himself, before giving those exhortations to the faithful, taught them by his own example; for after his conversion, hardly had he refreshed his body, worn out by a three days' fast, when he began to work for the conversion of the Jews and other sinners: "And immediately he preached Jesus in the synagogues, that He is the

¹ *Fratres mei, si quis ex vobis erraverit a veritate, et converterit quis eum, scire debet quoniam qui converti fecerit peccatorem ab errore viæ suæ, salvavit animam ejus a morte.*
—James v. 19, 20.

² *Vestra æmulatio provocavit plurimos.*—II. Cor. 12. 2.

Son of God.”¹ Our Lord Himself gave a similar exhortation to St. Peter, when foretelling to him his miserable fall and subsequent repentance. Peter, He said, thou wilt rise again after thy fall; but remember then thy obligation of helping others: “And thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren.”² Long before, David had acknowledged this duty; after having repented of the crimes of murder and adultery, his first resolution was to turn teacher and apostle, in order to bring back to the right path those who had strayed from it: “I will teach the unjust Thy ways; and the wicked shall be converted to Thee.”³ Therefore, my dear brethren, the law of charity binds us all to deter our neighbor from evil and to encourage him to do good, by instructing him if we can, and by exhorting and correcting him, if we have good reason for hoping that he will benefit thereby. I shall take another opportunity of speaking of this subject more at length.

More especially are we bound by our good conduct and edifying lives to give a holy example, so that the wicked with whom we have to associate may find therein a cause of salutary confusion, which may impel them to speedy repentance. That is what the Apostle so earnestly demands of the faithful. For instance, he writes to his disciple Titus: “But speak thou the things that become sound doctrine: that the aged men be sober; . . . the aged women in like manner, in holy attire; . . . young men in like manner exhort that they be sober . . . These things speak, and exhort and rebuke with all authority.”⁴ But above all, “in all things show thyself an example of good works, in doctrine, in integrity, in gravity, . . . that he who is on the contrary part may be afraid, having no evil to say of us.”⁵ Such, too, is the advice given by St. Peter to the pious: “Having your conversation good among the gentiles, that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by the good works which they shall behold in you glorify God in the day of visitation.”⁶ This doctrine they learned from the lips of their Master Jesus Christ,

But especially by good example.

¹ Et continuo in synagogis prædicabat Jesum, quoniam hic est Filius Dei. — Acts ix. 20.

² Et tu aliquando conversus, confirma fratres tuos. — Luke xxii. 32.

³ Dicoebo iniquos vias tuas, et impii ad te convertentur. — Ps. l. 15.

⁴ Tu autem loquere quæ decent sanam doctrinam; senes ut sobrii sint; anus similiter in habitu sancto; juvenes similiter hortare ut sobrii sint. Hæc loquere, et exhortare, et argue cum omni imperio. — Tit. ii. 1, 2, 3, 6, 15.

⁵ In omnibus teipsum præbe exemplum bonorum operum, in doctrina, in integritate, in gravitate; ut is qui ex adverso est, vereatur, nihil habens malum dicere de nobis. — Ibid. 7, 8.

⁶ Conversationem vestram inter gentes habentes bonam, ut in eo quod detrectant de vobis, tamquam de malefactoribus, ex bonis operibus vos considerantes, glorificent Deum in die visitationis. — I. Pet. ii. 12.

who had said to them, "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."¹

Therefore one is often bound to make known his good works.

But, asks St. Augustine, how, O dearest Lord, am I to understand that? In many other parts of Thy Gospel Thou commandest me to do quite the contrary, and to conceal my good works from the eyes of men, that they may not be seen. "Therefore, when thou dost an alms-deed," Thou sayest, "sound not a trumpet before thee," to let people know of it; but, "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth,"² when it gives alms. Wilt thou pray? "Enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret," that no man may see thee; "and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will repay thee."³ Wilt thou fast? Then let no outward sign of it appear in thy face: "Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not to men to fast, but to thy Father, who is in secret."⁴ In a word, Thou sayest the same of all our good works: "Take heed that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them; otherwise you shall not have a reward of your Father who is in heaven."⁵ Is there not an evident contradiction here? On the one side Thou commandest us to conceal our good works from the eyes of men; and on the other, to do them so that men may see them. How, then, can we fulfil this twofold precept according to Thy will? St. Augustine answers this question. To do good solely for the purpose of being seen by others and praised by them as pious is the vainglory that Christ condemns in hypocrites; to do good and lead a pious life, so as to be seen by men, not for the sake of gaining honor and praise, but to further the honor and glory of God; to do good, even in public, for the advantage of our neighbor, that he may be edified and encouraged to do good also, that is not only lawful, but praiseworthy and meritorious, and in many cases a matter of strict duty.

How differ- Thus a father of a family acts very well and according to the

¹ Sic luceat lux vestra coram hominibus, ut videant opera vestra bona, et glorificent Patrem vestrum, qui in coelis est.—Matt. v. 16.

² Cum ergo facis eleemosynam, noli tuba canere antete. Nesciat sinistra tua, quid faciat dextera tua.—Ibid. vi. 2, 3.

³ Intra in cubiculum tuum, et clauso ostio, ora Patrem tuum in abscondito; et Pater tuus qui videt in abscondito, reddet tibi.—Ibid. 6.

⁴ Tu autem cum jejunas, unge caput tuum, et faciem tuam lava, ne videaris hominibus jejunans, sed Patri tuo, qui est in abscondito.—Ibid. 17, 18.

⁵ Attendite ne iustitiam vestram faciat coram hominibus, ut videamini ab eis; alioquin mercedem non habebitis apud Patrem vestrum, qui in coelis est.—Ibid. 1.

requirements of Christian charity, who says or thinks to himself: ent people can do that.
I will go often and with all possible devotion to confession and holy Communion; I will assist every morning at the early Mass with folded hands and down-cast eyes; I will never neglect to hear a sermon on Sundays and holy-days; and that I will do publicly, so that my children, servants, neighbors, and other people of the same condition as myself may be induced to serve God in the same manner. In the morning I will kneel down and say my morning prayers; in the evening, before retiring to rest, I will assemble the whole household and will make the examen of conscience and say evening prayers. If poor beggars come to the door, I will give them an alms with my own hands, so that all in the house may be edified and encouraged to perform similar acts of devotion and charity. Thus, too, the mistress of a household acts very well and in accordance with the law of the love of God and of our neighbor, when she thinks or says: I will dress modestly and in a Christian manner, and will not hesitate to appear thus dressed in public, although I should be the only one to do so; for my example may be the means of inducing others of my condition to imitate me. I will keep my daughter at home in seclusion, teach her to keep house and to do other work suited to her condition, and not allow her to frequent parties, so that others like me may be encouraged to do as I do, and to unite with me in procuring the honor and glory of our heavenly Father. Oh, what wonderful changes might be brought about in the world by such edifying example! How much good was not done by a St. Clotilde, a St. Elizabeth, a St. Frances of Rome, who by their good example converted not only their own husbands, but whole towns and countries, from a wicked life to a good one, or from a vain life to a better one!

St. Gregory says that in certain circumstances one may praise himself, his good works, his virtues, and his mode of life, if he does it with a proper end in view, that is, for the honor and glory of God and to encourage other men to follow his good example. Many holy servants of God praised themselves in that way. A noble youth, who was brought up most delicately and in all the luxury of the world, moved by a divine inspiration, left everything and went to St. Macarius, to lead a holy life in solitude. During the first few days, while he was still treated as a stranger, things went well enough with him; but when he had to eat and sleep like the community, he found it rather hard. Nay, sometimes one may praise his own good works, as some saints have done.

A piece of dry bread, a jar of spring water and now and then a few spoonfuls of unsalted vegetables were his only food; besides that, he had to sleep on a hard bed of straw, and to rise in the middle of the night to go to choir. What difficulty he had in persuading his stomach to submit to such treatment! He wandered about, full of sadness, thinking of the life he formerly led. I cannot stand this another month, he said to himself; it will kill me. St. Macarius, seeing the temptation he was in, went to him, and said to him in a most friendly manner: have courage, my son, do not lose heart; you will not die so easily as you think! Look at my gray hairs; I can hardly count the years I have spent in the religious life; and in all these years I have never eaten bread enough to still the pangs of hunger; nor fully quenched my thirst, even with cold water, nor slept long enough to give my body the necessary repose; besides that, I have daily chastised my body with severe penances; and nevertheless, as you see, I am in vigorous health, in spite of my advanced age. But, O holy man, thou art praising thyself! The praise given him by others is torture in the ears of one who is really virtuous, while the praise that one gives himself is a source of scandal to others. No, St. Macarius might have answered; in order to give good example, and to encourage this young man to persevere in his holy undertaking, I do not hesitate for a moment to speak of my good works. Job, otherwise so humble, boasts before the whole world: "I was an eye to the blind, and a foot to the lame. I was the father of the poor;"¹ that is, I helped all, and assisted them in their corporal and spiritual necessities, as well as I could. Does not the great St. Paul relate in detail to the Corinthians the labors he underwent, the good works he performed? "They are the ministers of Christ; I am more; in many more labors, in prisons more frequently, in stripes above measure, in deaths often."² Nay, he proposes himself as an example for their imitation: "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ."³

How we
can and
must imi-
tate them
in this re-
spect.

Therefore a mother need make no scruple of her seeming self-praise, when she says to her daughters, although they may be already married: when I was your age, I was much more modest than you are; I did not even dream of going out to parties as you do, of dressing in the latest fashion, of spending my time

¹ *Oculus fui caeco, et pes claudo. Pater eram pauperum.*—Job. xxix. 15, 16.

² *Ministri Christi sunt; plus ego; in laboribus plurimis, in carceribus abundantius, in plagis supra modum, in mortibus frequenter.*—II. Cor. xi. 23.

³ *Imitatores mei estote, sicut et ego Christi.*—I. Cor. xi. 1.

idly at the window, or in unnecessary visits, etc. My parents (may God and they be thanked for it!) brought me up much better; why do you not imitate me? Why do you not bring up your children in the same manner? etc. Nor need the master or mistress make any scruple of saying to the servants: see, I, your master or mistress, am so quiet, so modest, so meek, so charitable; why do not you, who are but a servant, be the same towards your fellows? Nor need any one make a scruple of saying in company: God be praised, I am not aware that a farthing of unjust gain ever came into my hands; or that, through human respect, I ever said a word more or less than what my duty required; or that I ever encouraged any one to drink more than was good for him. I do not allow card-parties to meet at my house, nor permit my wife or daughters to dress too extravagantly; no one in my house would dare to appear at nightly gatherings, etc. In a word, when one has a good object in view, it is not only praiseworthy and meritorious to show that one practises good works, especially when they are commanded by the law of God, but it is even necessary and a matter of duty to do so. For, if it is our bounden duty, according to the law of Christian charity and mercy, to give good advice, what better advice can there be than good example, given for the praiseworthy motives I have mentioned? "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works." Mark, my dear brethren, how Christ compares good example to a light. And why? A lighted candle sheds its rays on all sides of it, but see where the flame points to; it always points to heaven. Such, too, should be the nature of the good example we give; it must shine on all sides and be seen by all men; but our intention must be directed to heaven, to God, in order to seek His honor alone and the spiritual good of others.

Now, if the law of charity towards all men obliges us to give good example to those with whom we have to do, in order to induce the wicked to amend their lives, how much more are we not bound to avoid doing anything, even if we imagine it to be lawful, which could encourage the wicked in their vicious practices, or be an occasion of sin to the innocent? Read the history of the Machabees, and you will find an Eleazer, an old man of ninety, who was threatened by the tyrant with a most cruel death, if he did not eat of certain meats that were forbidden by the Jewish law. "But he," says the Scripture, "choosing rather a most glorious death than a hateful life.

Hence we must refrain from giving bad example.

went forward of his own accord to the torment.”¹ His friends took pity on him and brought him secretly other meats, that it was lawful to eat, and begged of him to eat them, so as to satisfy the tyrant and save his own life. What? was the hero’s answer; must I begin to have recourse to deceit in my old age? The meat you bring me may be lawful to eat, but not under the present circumstances; for what would the young men of our nation think? They would imagine that Eleazer had eaten forbidden meats, and thus would be scandalized in me, who should on account of my age give them good example. No, I would rather die! “Wherefore, by departing manfully out of this life, I shall show myself worthy of my old age: and I shall leave an example of fortitude to young men, if with a ready mind and constancy I suffer an honorable death for the most venerable and most holy laws. And having spoken thus, he was forthwith carried to execution.”² “Thus,” concludes the history, “did this man die, leaving not only to young men, but also to the whole nation, the memory of his death for an example of virtue and fortitude.”³

And often
abstain
from what
is other-
wise lawful.

Hear what St. Paul says: “If meat scandalize my brother, I will never eat flesh, lest I should scandalize my brother.”⁴ Speaking of these words, St. Ambrose says: “So much regard should we have for the law of charity, that we should consider lawful things as unlawful, lest they might be a source of sin to others.”⁵ There are, namely, many things lawful and decent in themselves; but! but! What is the meaning of that but? For instance, conversation or intimacy with this or that person may be lawful in itself, so that not the least evil is done, even in thought; but if it occurs too often, it furnishes the neighbors or servants with matter for a reasonable suspicion of evil. A young girl dresses above her means; she has to work hard during the week in order to be able to appear in the newest fashions on Sundays and holy-days; of course, there is nothing wrong in

¹ At ille, gloriosissimam mortem magis quam odibilem vitam complectens, voluntarie præibat ad supplicium.—II. Mach. vi. 19.

² Quamobrem fortiter vita excedendo, senectute quidem dignus apparebo; adolescentibus autem exemplum forte relinquam, si prompto animo ac fortiter pro gravissimis ac sanctissimis legibus honesta morte perfungar. His dictis, confestim ad supplicium trahabatur.—Ibid. 27, 28.

³ Et iste quidem hoc modo vita decessit, non solum juvenibus, sed et universæ genti memoriam mortis suæ ad exemplum virtutis et fortitudinis derelinquens.—Ibid. 31.

⁴ Si esca scandalizat fratrem meum, non manducabo carnem in æternum, ne fratrem meum scandalizem.—I. Cor. viii. 13.

⁵ Tantopere charitati studendum est, ut licita pro illicitis habeantur, ne obsint fratri nostro.—St. Ambr. in hunc locum.

all this; but what ideas does it put into people's heads about her! Nor have they unreasonable grounds for their suspicions. A woman dresses like others of her standing, according to the vain fashions of the world, but, as she imagines, she does not transgress the bounds of decorum; she takes part in Shrove-tide amusements and is fond of going to parties; all that is lawful enough, according to her ideas; but by the apparently lawful customs she follows, she helps to keep up abuses that are not lawful. In these and similar circumstances Christian charity obliges us, when we can do so without suffering any great loss, to give up that conversation, that intimacy, that extravagance in dress, that worldly custom, in order not to scandalize others. This applies specially to persons whose condition is one which gives them the reputation of holiness, such as persons consecrated to God, the members of the clergy, whether regular or secular, as also those gentlemen and ladies who are looked on as holy; one individual of that kind can do more harm by giving scandal in the way I have mentioned, than twenty others. And why? Because the others appeal to their example in support of the abuses in which they indulge; see, they exclaim, So-and-so does it; he certainly wishes to go to heaven, and yet he makes no scruple of acting in that way. See how those children behave, and yet it is a well-known fact that their parents are very pious people.

And what conclusion am I to draw from all this, my dear brethren? If Christian charity requires us to avoid what is lawful in itself, lest we should give occasion of sin to others, what a terrible sin, crying to heaven for vengeance, they are guilty of, who try to propagate wickedness by word and example, by advice and instruction, by approval and instigation, and to lead others into sin! St. John Chrysostom calls such people "agents and representatives of the devil, murderers of souls, betrayers of the Blood of Jesus Christ."¹ In former times the Venetians and the French besieged the town of Ptolemais, and surrounded it so effectually that no citizen or soldier of the town could give the least information concerning himself to his friends living outside. Not far off the Sultan was encamped, so that his colors could be seen from a high tower; but all means of access to the town were cut off. Nevertheless, a way was at last found of interchanging letters between the Sultan and the commandant of the town. The latter had a

How wicked, then, it must be to give scandal.

¹ Supplementum diaboli.

pigeon, which was accustomed to fly into the neighboring forest, in which the Sultan was encamped, and then to return to the town. Whenever he wished to send a letter, he tied it under the wing of the pigeon, which flew off with it in the desired direction, and brought back an answer. This interchange of letters went on for a long time, until at last the innocent messenger flew into the enemies' camp, and it was at once seized. The letters it carried were directed to the commandant, and were to the effect that the Sultan would attack the enemy in a few days, and then come to the assistance of the beleaguered town. Instead of this letter, another was written, in a handwriting resembling that of the former, telling the commandant that no help was to be expected, and ordering him, in the name of the Sultan, to capitulate at once, in order to save the lives of his soldiers. The pigeon was again made the letter-carrier, and it flew back without delay to the town, bearing its treacherous message. The commandant, not suspecting anything, and certain that he was obeying his sovereign's orders, hoisted the white flag on the walls, and surrendered the fortress. The bird, my dear brethren, was quite innocent, for it knew nothing of what it was carrying under its wing; yet by its help the treachery was accomplished and the fortress seized. But what name should we give to those who in any way are the occasion of scandal to their neighbor? They are owls and ravens and unclean birds of prey, that deliberately fly about to seize for the devil souls that the crafty tempter has been besieging for years without being able to induce them to surrender to him. Oh, woe to them! "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh."¹ They who know themselves to be guilty in this respect, are, above all other men, under a special obligation of doing all they can for the future in word and deed to help to convert the wicked, so as to gain for God either the souls they have perverted, or, if that is impossible, the souls of others, in order to make good the loss they have occasioned the almighty God. When Octavius Augustus heard of the slaughter of his three best legions, which was caused by the negligence of Quintilius Varus, he cried out, full of indignation, "Quintilius Varus, give me back my legions!"² Such is the reproof those people will have to expect from God, who will cry out to them in a terrible voice from His judgment-seat: give Me back the souls you took

¹ *Vae homini illi per quem scandalum venit.*—Matt. xviii. 7.

² *Quintilli Vare! redde legiones*—Sueton., Oct. Aug., c. xxiii.

from Me! Restore to Me the souls that you have stolen from Me by giving them scandal!

My dear brethren, I trust that none of us is guilty in that way. If we are obliged to go into the company of the wicked, let us make use of our intercourse with them according to the law of Christian charity, and in the manner in which God makes use of His patience in bearing with sinners; that is, not only for the good of our own souls, but also for the good of the souls of others. Most of that good will be the work of our edifying example; and none of us, no matter what is his state or condition, can reasonably excuse himself from the performance of this duty. And if we have no other means at hand to help in the conversion of the wicked during this specially dangerous season of Shrove-tide, let us, at all events, recommend them to the mercy of God by fervent prayer, so that they and we may be kept from grievous sin, or, if they have already fallen, that they may do penance at once, and that we may help each other to persevere in good to the end of our lives, until we shall meet in the society of the elect in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Conclusion
and resolution
to work
for the sal-
vation of
souls
when in the
company of
the wicked.

On Fraternal Correction, see several Sermons in the following Fourth Part. On the Daily Examen of Conscience, as a Means of Persevering in Good, see the preceding First Part. On Diligence in Hearing the Word of God in Sermons, for the same end, see the Fourth Part. On the Frequent Meditation on Death and Eternity, see the Fifth Part.

ON DOING PENANCE DURING THE TIME OF A JUBILEE.

SIXTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE YEAR OF A JUBILEE, AS A TIME OF SPECIAL GRACES.

Subject.

During this time, 1. prisoners are released; 2. sold or forfeited goods are restored; 3. debts that have been incurred are remitted, together with all the punishment that may be due on account of them. Therefore no one should fail to profit by such a favorable opportunity.—*Preached in the year 1730, on the first Sunday when the Jubilee proclaimed by the recently elected Pontiff, Clement XII., was published.*

Text.

Vocabis remissionem cunctis habitatoribus terræ tuæ; ipse est enim Jubilæus.—Levit. xxv. 10.

“Thou shalt proclaim remission to all the inhabitants of the land; for it is the year of jubilee.”

Introduction.

Amongst other laws which the Lord God commanded His servant Moses to announce to His chosen people was this: Every week I reserve a day to Myself, which shall be sanctified in My honor, and that is the Sabbath; every fiftieth year I reserve to Myself, and that shall be called the holy year, or the jubilee. Five months beforehand that year shall be announced in all the towns by the joyful sound of the trumpet, and all the people shall with unusual signs of joy and festivity meet in the temple of Jerusalem, in order to hold a feast in honor of their God.” And what, O Jews! was the occasion of this extraordinary exulta-

tion on your part? The special favors that God bestowed in the jubilee year. What favors were they? All debts were remitted to those who had contracted any that they were not able to pay: "Thou shalt proclaim remission." They who had sold their houses or lands could regain possession of them, so that all immovable property returned to its former owner: "Every man shall return to his possession."¹ The prisons were opened, and those detained therein were set at liberty, and slaves were made free: "And every one shall go back to his former family."² And was that all? Yes, that was all. O shadows! figures! symbols! your time has passed, says St. Paul: "Now all these things happened to them in figure."³ What joyful times we Christians live in, who possess in reality that which the Hebrews had only in figure! "Thou shalt proclaim remission to all the inhabitants of the land; for it is the year of jubilee," such is the message sent us from Rome to-day by the voice of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Rejoice, then, and exult far more than the Jews did of old; for the favors conceded to them affected only their bodies and their temporal welfare; while those conferred on us by God in this jubilee are for the good of our souls and for our eternal happiness, as I shall now explain.

Plan of Discourse.

The jubilee year is a time of special graces for us Christians. Why? Because prisoners are released from slavery. The first grace. Because sold or forfeited goods are restored. The second grace. Because debts that have been incurred are remitted, together with all the punishment that may be due on account of them. The third grace which is offered during this season of graces. Therefore no one should fail to profit by such a favorable opportunity. Such is the subject of this sermon.

Father of mercy, who now openest the inexhaustible treasures of the merits gained for us by Thy Son Jesus Christ, and scatterest Thy graces with the utmost liberality, prepare our hearts and increase our desires, so that we may receive them in full measure! This we beg of Thee through the Mother of Thy Son, Mary full of grace, and the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

¹ Revertetur homo ad possessionem suam.—Levit. xxv. 10.

² Et unusquisque rediet ad familiam pristinam.—Ibid.

³ Hec autem omnia in figura contingebant illis.—I. Cor. x. 11.

First Point.

Miserable
condition
of Chris-
tians en-
slaved by
the Turks.

A pitiful spectacle it was, as we read in old histories and hear from those in our own days who were eye-witnesses of it, to see how the Christians who were taken prisoners by the Turks, Algerians, and Saracens, were treated; how in the morning they were driven out of their dungeons to work, their hands and feet laden with chains, while their flagging strength was urged on to incessant toil by frequent blows of the whip, as if they were horses or oxen. Pitiful it was to hear them moan and sigh, in the midst of their torments and miseries, with their bodies so emaciated that they resembled corpses more than living beings. Pitiful to hear them cry for mercy, and to see how they had to fight among themselves for the wretched bit of coarse bread that was thrown to them, as if they were greyhounds training for a hunt just let out of the kennel to be fed. And amongst these wretched mortals there were sometimes men who were formerly in a high position, and delicate children, who, as they had not the means of paying their ransom, were reduced to such miserable straits. Truly a pitiful spectacle!

What diffi-
cult condi-
tions would
they not
joyfully ful-
fil to be
restored to
liberty.

What do I mean by telling you this, my dear brethren? Do I mean, perhaps, to console you by telling you that in this jubilee year all those prisoners are to be released from slavery, and to be restored to freedom? Ah, would that I could bring them such a joyful message! If one were to appear to-day before their dungeons, and to cry out in a loud voice, to the sound of the trumpet: "Every one shall go back to his former family. Hear, ye suffering people! All the prisoners of this land are set at liberty! come out at once! lay aside your chains! You are free, on the sole condition of doing homage to the Sultan, or of humbly petitioning his ambassador, who is a mute and cannot say a word to you, to be set at liberty, with the promise that you will never again set foot in this country. Fulfil that condition, and you are free." What do you think, my dear brethren? Would there not be unspeakable joy and exultation amongst the unhappy slaves? Would they not, rising, as it were, from the dead, willingly perform whatever act of homage might be required from them? Would they not solemnly promise, by all that is dear to them, never again to set foot in a land in which they have suffered so much? Would there be even one of them who would hesitate as to fulfilling the condition imposed on him in order to regain his freedom? Ah! if he had, in addition to that, to sacrifice all his possessions, he would cheerfully consent

to do so. But I cannot bring such a welcome message to the unhappy slaves.

Christians, are there not prisoners of the kind amongst ourselves nowadays? Nor do I allude now to those malefactors who are kept in prison here and there throughout the country; even they would rejoice if they were told that in this year of jubilee they were to be set at liberty and freed from the punishment of death. I am speaking of ourselves, who are now assembled here; and I ask, are there no slaves amongst us? Would to God that we could all boast with truth of enjoying that freedom of which St. Paul writes to the Romans: "The creature also itself shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God."¹ But, alas! sinners who are still in the state of sin, what are you? You are poor prisoners and bond-slaves. Such is the name given you by Our Lord in the Gospel of St. John: "Amen, amen, I say unto you, that whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin."² And who is it that keeps you in slavery? Are you groaning under the heavy yoke of the Algerians? or of the Saracens? or of the Turks? If that were the case, you would be wretched indeed, and you would deserve my most heartfelt commiseration; but even then you would not be so much to be pitied as you are now. Hear how St. Paul describes your slavery: "And they may recover themselves from the snares of the devil, by whom they are held captive at his will."³ So that you are slaves of the devil, with whom no tyrant can vie in cruelty; you are bound with as many chains as you are subject to vices; you are given over to as many tortures, as you have evil inclinations that you do not resist; you suffer all the more from hunger and thirst, as your conscience enjoys less of heavenly consolation; and if you remain longer in that slavery, the eternal dungeons of hell are prepared for you. Unhappy wretches that you are! and all the more unhappy, because you do not know your misery!

It is a joyful message, O sinners, that I have to deliver to you to-day. The trumpet is sounded, and everywhere remission is proclaimed to all the inhabitants of the land; for it is the year of jubilee. Come forth, then, at once from the prison in

Sinners are
enslaved by
the devil.

To-day ransom is offered to them under easy conditions.

¹ Ipsa creatura liberabitur a servitute corruptionis in libertatem gloriæ filiorum Dei.—Rom. viii. 21.

² Amen, amen, dico vobis, quia omnis qui facit peccatum, servus est peccati.—John viii. 34.

³ Et respiscant a diaboli laqueis, a quo captivi tenentur ad ipsius voluntatem.—II. Tim. ii. 26.

which you have been groaning under the yoke of the devil. Jesus Christ offers to pay your ransom and to give you freely His own most sacred flesh and blood and all His merits; you need not pay a penny to obtain your liberty; all you have to do is to make an act of homage to your offended God, to visit once the three churches appointed for the purpose, to fast for three days according to the usual custom of the Church, to give a small alms to the poor, according to your means, to say devoutly a few "Our Fathers" for the intention of the Church, to repent of your sins and confess them to a priest, who is the ambassador of God, and is, so to speak, dumb and speechless, and to promise sincerely that you will not return again to that land of your captivity. That is all you have to do, in order to be set at liberty, to enjoy peace of conscience, and to possess the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Which they
should joy-
fully fulfil.

"Do you think it too much? Are the conditions too difficult to gain such a great favor? Are they too much for a sinner who has often merited hell-fire, and who should consider it a great favor indeed if by suffering all the torments in the world he could do penance for his sins and escape eternal death? Ah, fathers, mothers, if your children were lying on their death-beds, what sums of money would you not be willing to give, if you could thereby have them restored to health! Dutiful children, if your father or mother were in danger of death, would you spare any trouble to avert that danger? And now your own, only, immortal soul is groaning in the slavery of the devil, in imminent danger of everlasting death; the grace of redemption is offered you, and yet you hesitate about fulfilling the conditions, easy as they are, that will enable you to profit by that grace! Lose no time, then; break at once the chains of your vices, that bind you. "Behold, now is the acceptable time," I say to you, in the words of St. Paul; "behold now is the day of salvation." This is the day of your redemption. But where shall I go? asks the prisoner on the day of his release. I have lost all I possessed in the world; house and home are sold; there is nothing I can call my own; what have I gained by my release, since I must now beg my bread from door to door? Do not trouble yourselves, O sinners, by such thoughts, if you are really desirous of regaining your freedom; for all that you have lost or sold will be restored to you: "Every man shall return to his possession;" such is the command given to the Jews by God during the

¹ Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile, ecce nunc dies salutis.—II. Cor. vi. 2.

jubilee year; and it also expresses the grace offered to all men now in this jubilee that we are celebrating.

Second Point.

Truly, you have reason to shed tears of blood, sinful Christian, when you consider your unhappy state! You lost and forfeited great treasures, when you allowed yourself to be made a slave of the devil by transgressing the divine commands; you have forfeited all the spiritual goods of your soul, all the supernatural graces and virtues which were infused into you in baptism. Not one of them all has remained to you except faith and hope, and not even these, if you have sinned grievously against them. In losing sanctifying grace you have lost the favor and friendship of God, and the merits of all the good works that you had done during your whole former life. See if you can count all the good works you have done from the time when you first came to the use of reason, to the first mortal sin you committed. How often have you been to confession, to holy Communion? How many Masses have you heard, thus offering to God a sacrifice infinitely pleasing in His sight? How many rosaries and other prayers have you sent up to heaven? How often have you directed your daily labor to God by the good intention? How often have you given alms to Jesus Christ in the person of His poor? How often have you fasted and made acts of charity, humility, meekness, patience, resignation to the divine will, mercy, and Christian mortification? Every one of those acts, nay, every thought, every step, every movement of your body, while you were in the state of grace and in the friendship of God, provided you had a good intention, earned for you an increase of sanctifying grace and a new degree of eternal glory in heaven. But the moment you consented to a grievous sin and became a slave of the devil you lost all those treasures of grace and merit forever, and not the least reward was due to you for them. Nay, you lost the coffer as well as the gold; you forfeited the very house in which those treasures were kept, that is, your immortal soul; and what is most deplorable of all, you forfeited heaven with its joys and glories, nay, your very right and claim to heaven and to the possession of God that was formerly yours. In truth, that was a transaction of the greatest importance, in which such valuable treasures were bartered!

The sinner, by falling into slavery, forfeits all the treasures of his soul.

And what price did you get for them? Ah, God help us! As the Prophet David says of you and those like you, "They And for nothing."

set at naught the desirable land;"¹ they have bartered heaven and everything worth having for a mere nothing. How ill those two expressions harmonize, "the desirable land," and, "set at naught"! Heaven given away for nothing! Yes, for nothing; and it is what sinners do every day. That brutal lust, that vanishes in a second, and that is often admitted only in thoughts voluntarily entertained; that empty honor and praise of men, which disappears like smoke before the wind; that trifling gain made unjustly, which is squandered in a day; that hatred and feeling of revenge against one's neighbor, which fills the heart with bitterness; those curses and imprecations that escape in a moment of deliberate anger; that childish fear or love of a creature, that so often leads to evil; that impure or uncharitable remark, that so often slips into a conversation; that vain and scandalous style of dress, that only provokes ridicule and laughter; such is the price demanded by those foolish people, and offered and agreed to by the hellish purchaser; and for it heaven and its eternal goods are given away, "set at naught"!

Even the
just give up
heaven for
a time.

Just souls! even the habit of committing venial sins, although it does not cause you to forfeit heaven forever, yet makes you, as it were, place it in pawn for a time. By every jocose lie, every wilful movement of anger and impatience, every word uttered deliberately through anger or revenge, every wilful distraction in prayer, every little act of irreverence in church, every suspicious thought, every curious glance at a person of the opposite sex, a man says in reality: I am satisfied to be deprived of the possession of heaven, of the enjoyment of the merits I have accumulated, of the glorious vision of God, my sovereign and supreme good, and of the endless joys prepared for me; I am satisfied to be deprived of them for a day, a month, or one, two, ten, or twenty years, according to the gravity of the sin, or the amount of deliberation with which it was committed; and these sins sometimes are so numerous that, if they are not atoned for here on earth, one has to remain in purgatory and to be excluded from heaven till the Day of Judgment. And all that for nothing! Poor mortals! what a terrible loss! Well may you lament and sigh when you think of it! Doubtless you imagine that, when your sins are forgiven and you are released from captivity and again restored to liberty, there will be nothing for you but to go about the world bare and naked as to your soul, like a needy beggar, seeking for nourishment that is,

¹ Pro nihilo habuerunt terram desiderabilem.—Ps. cv. 24.

trying to get back some more merits by additional good works.

Poor mortal, be comforted! I have a cheering message for you! "Behold, now is the acceptable time," in which all those spiritual goods that you have forfeited, lost, squandered, or given away, will be restored to you, if you only fulfil a few conditions. O sacred jubilee! thou art that desirable time, in which every contract made with the devil can be nullified and rendered void forever; in which all former gifts, graces, merits, virtues, and ornaments of the soul, as well as God Himself and the kingdom of heaven, can be restored to the penitent, and that, too, with considerable additions. "Every man shall return to his possession;" all who wish it can regain possession of their former inheritance. And what price have we to pay? A short prayer after having repented of and confessed our sins, a trifling alms, and a little fasting. O holy Prophet! thou complainest of the folly and madness of sinners in setting at naught the desirable land; to-day I must invert the sense of thy words, and say that they can have the desirable land for nothing; so great is our good fortune, that we can purchase the land of the living for a mere nothing; for the God of goodness announces to us that, although we have bartered for nothing His heaven and the treasures He had bestowed on us, yet He now offers them back to us for the same price, for nothing.

Now they
can redeem
everything
for a mere
nothing al-
most.

Christians, where is now our avarice and greed of gain? Shall we allow this golden opportunity to go by unprofitd of? Should we not rather set aside all other affairs, and with all diligence labor to gain such a great advantage, since we can do it in a short time, by cleansing our conscience from the filth of sin, and fulfilling the few prescribed conditions as well as we can? Oh! if Esau, after having sold his birth-right for a mess of pottage, could have bought it back again at the same price; if the foolish king Lysimachus, who sold his kingdom for a drink of water when he was thirsty, could have regained it by giving another drink of water for it, how happy would they not both have been, and how ready to pay even a far greater price! Ah! if I said to one of you: see that fine house, that beautiful garden, that fruitful land, that noble property, which you were forced to sell or mortgage; now is your time to redeem or re-purchase it; what! he would at once reply, what price will I have to pay for it? I have no money now, nor do I expect to have enough to redeem it. No matter, I would say; a few pence will be sufficient; when you have paid them, the title-

Therefore
no one
should neg-
lect doing
so.

deeds of your property will be handed to you. Oh, with what joy he would at once run out of the church and get the sum required! Christians, I ask you again, where is our avarice and greed of gain? It is not a handful of earth, or a perishable house, or a garden, or a piece of ground, or an earthly kingdom that is offered to us, but the eternal goods, the beautiful heaven that we have so wantonly given away; these we can now regain possession of during this time, by performing a few works of devotion; and yet we hesitate; we do not yet see the great fortune that is within our grasp, if we only wish to stretch out our hands for it!

Difference between the jubilee and an ordinary confession.

Yes, you exclaim, that is all very well; but why do you exaggerate so much your praises of the jubilee year? All that you have said is indeed very true, and is very desirable, too; but we need not have recourse to the jubilee in order to gain those advantages; we have another means at hand, if we wish to avail ourselves of it, namely, the sacrament of penance; a good confession will free the sinner from the yoke of the devil, restore him to the freedom of the children of God, and give back to him all his lost merits, supernatural virtues, and other ornaments of the soul, as well as God and heaven, so that there is nothing very extraordinary in the jubilee year, after all. The first statement is true, my dear brethren, but not the second. For there is a great difference between an ordinary confession, and the penance one does during the jubilee. "Thou shalt proclaim remission to all the inhabitants of the land." Not only are all debts remitted, but also all punishment. And this is the third grace which the jubilee offers us, and which we do not always gain by our ordinary confessions.

Third Point.

In confession the guilt, but not all the punishment due to sin, is remitted.

Sometimes those who are taken prisoners by the Turks and Saracens, and those, too, among Christians who are imprisoned on account of debt, are allowed to leave their prison, but they must still wear their chains or be attended by a guard; and in this guise they wander about the country, begging, until they have collected enough to ransom themselves or to pay their debts. Occasionally, too, a forfeited property is given back to its former owner, on the condition that he pays a certain sum every year, until the whole mortgage is paid off. That is, indeed, a favor for those people, but it is not a complete favor; it is a remission, but imposes the burden of a yearly payment. So it is, my dear

brethren, with the sacrament of penance ordinarily speaking. It frees the sinner from the dungeons of hell, and sets him at liberty; but it still leaves him in debt, and he has to work until he has the amount required to settle his account fully. His lost spiritual goods are restored to him, but he has still to pay a heavy interest, until the whole capital is repaid; that is, the guilt of sin is forgiven, so that he is again a friend of God, but not the punishment which he still owes the strict justice of God; and that punishment must bear some proportion to the eternal pains he has merited, nor can any one hope that the just God will remit or forgive any part of it. Even the smallest sin must be punished, and if the sinner does not atone for it in this life, either by bearing patiently the trials sent him by God, or by voluntary works of penance, or by other works of devotion which have the power of satisfying for sin, he must suffer severely for it in the next life, in that place of torments of which the divine Judge says, "Amen, I say to thee, thou shalt not go from thence till thou repay the last farthing."¹

O man, look back on your life, and bring to mind, if you can, all your sins. See how many you have committed from your seventh year, when you first came to the use of reason, to the present moment, with eyes, ears, tongue, hands, body, and in the thoughts and desires of your heart; how many you have committed through deliberate malice, how many through weakness and frailty, how many through negligence and sloth, how many in act, how many in omission, how many knowingly, how many through culpable ignorance, how many alone by yourself, how many in company with others; how many you have caused others to commit by giving scandal, or by negligence in performing the duties of your state; how many grievous, how many venial sins you have been guilty of. Ah, what a fearful number of sins you will thus bring to mind! And how long will you have to suffer in the next life on account of them? Perhaps a hundred, perhaps a thousand years, or even till the Day of Judgment? I cannot tell you how long; but this much I know for certain, that, if the good God does not show mercy to you now, and remit all the debts you have contracted by sin, you will have to suffer in the next life until you shall have paid the last farthing, unless you atone fully in this life. Now count your good and satisfactory works, and see how much of the debt you have paid off. See what penance you have done: count up your fastings,

The sinner has incurred a heavy debt of punishment, and wiped out very little of it.

¹ Amen dico tibi, non exies inde, donec reddas novissimum quadrantem.—Matt. v. 26.

prayers, almsdeeds, and other works of satisfaction; perhaps their number will be very small. And it may be, too, that they were performed so tepidly, so distractedly, so faultily, and without a pure intention, that, instead of lessening, you have rather increased your debt of punishment. O my God, what will Thy justice demand of me ! Thus the immense debt you have incurred in the sight of God still remains to be paid almost in its entirety.

All punishment can be wiped out during this time.

Now you can understand the greatness of the grace that is offered you to-day ; all this punishment will be remitted completely during this jubilee, provided you perform the works prescribed properly and with due dispositions. If you had deserved hell a hundred thousand million times, nay, if you had committed all the sins of the world, and had still to suffer for them all, you can now get rid of the whole debt, so that you will owe nothing more to God's justice. That which cost so many holy confessors and penitents bitter tears, and fasting, and prayer for many years; that which the martyrs of Christ had to purchase by shedding their blood, by sacrificing all their worldly possessions and giving up their very lives; that is now offered you for a mere nothing. The emperor Tiberius caused Agrippa, one of the most illustrious of the Roman nobles, to be cast into prison ; and to add to his punishment, he ordered him to be bound by a heavy iron chain, as a slave. In this lamentable plight Agrippa languished for a time, in hourly expectation of death. Some months afterwards Tiberius died and was succeeded by Caligula. The latter at once caused Agrippa to be set at liberty; but not content with that, he also had a large chain made of pure gold, as heavy as the iron chain that Agrippa wore in prison, and sent it to him as a present. This, said he, will serve to show you that I wish to bind you to me as closely as you were formerly bound by the iron chain, so that you may know to what degree you enjoy my favor. What a happy exchange that was ! To be freed from prison and from the danger of death, to become a favorite of the emperor ! O sinner, much greater is the favor that the great Monarch of heaven now offers you, if you will be only truly converted to Him. Not only will He free you from the prison in which you have been lying, bound as a slave of the devil, but after having remitted the whole debt of punishment you owed Him, He will bestow on you a golden chain, that is, the precious treasure of sanctifying grace, as a sign of your having become a child and friend of God, and a lawful

heir to the kingdom of heaven, so that, if you were to die suddenly after having gained this indulgence, you would, like a newly-baptized infant, go at once into heaven. Let no one imagine, my dear brethren, that the few conditions prescribed, namely, the fasting, prayer, visiting the church, and almsgiving, are able of themselves to effect that. No, for they cannot satisfy the strict justice of God; and yet that justice is fully satisfied, for it is Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God, who offers to His heavenly Father full satisfaction for our sins, out of the endless treasures of His merits, which He now opens to His Vicar on earth, that they may be distributed to the faithful.

Finally, you can receive that complete remission from any approved priest, no matter who he is, and no matter how grievous your sins are, even if the Pope alone could absolve from them under ordinary circumstances; and, moreover, any vow that you may have made (save and except only the vow of perpetual chastity and the vow of entering religion) you can have changed into any other pious work. O my God! how generous and even prodigal Thou art in bestowing Thy gifts and graces on us poor mortals, who are so little deserving of them. Ah, let the joyful news of this jubilee be announced also to the poor souls in purgatory, who long so eagerly to be released from their torments! (I dare not ask any favor for the damned, because there is no redemption for them.) Oh, what would not those poor souls do to gain the jubilee? Would they fast for three days? or confess to a priest the sins they committed during their lives? or visit the churches? or say seven "Our Fathers"? Ah, put before them all the torments Thy holy martyrs have undergone; tell them they must suffer them all in order to obtain remission of the punishment still due to them, and they would accept the condition with joy. And yet, what Thou refusest to do for those dear friends of Thine, even under such difficult conditions, Thou now offerest to us poor sinners for a mere nothing.

What, then, remains for us, O God of goodness, but to thank Thee with all our hearts for such a great and unmerited favor, to make a firm resolution to fulfil the prescribed works with the utmost diligence, and, above all, to be converted to Thee by true penance, for that is the chief end of the jubilee. Yes, O Lord, such is my firm resolve! Impure intimacy, proximate occasion of sin, away with you! I have done with you! Out of my house at once; for, as long as you are there, I cannot be converted to God. Hatred and anger against my neighbor, away

What a
great grace!

Conclusion
and resolution
to fulfil perfectly
the prescribed conditions.

with you out of my heart! I forgive all who have ever offended me! I offer my friendship to all, for otherwise I cannot be converted to God! Ill-gotten gains, away with you; I do not want you any more; for without restitution I cannot be converted to God. I must not allow this precious opportunity, which will perhaps never occur again during my life-time, to go by unprofited of, so that, being all fully reconciled to Thee, our God, we may help to avert the dangers and calamities that threaten the Catholic Church and all Christendom, and after having renewed and amended our lives, may serve Thee for the future with greater zeal and constancy to the end. Amen.

Another Introduction for the same Sermon, for any feast on which a Plenary Indulgence is accorded.

Text.

Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile; ecce nunc dies salutis.—II. Cor. vi. 2.

“Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Introduction.

In the Old Law there was no more desirable time for the Jews than the advent of the fiftieth year, of which a detailed description is given in the Book of Leviticus, in the twenty-fifth chapter. Five months beforehand it was announced in all the towns, etc. *Continues as above, with the few changes which are necessary to make the sermon applicable to the feast.*

SIXTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE WICKEDNESS OF THOSE WHO REFUSE TO BE CONVERTED DURING THE JUBILEE.

Subject.

The Christian who now refuses to be fully reconciled to God acts most wickedly towards all Christendom.—*Preached on the second Sunday of the Jubilee.*

Text.

Obsecramus pro Christo, reconciliamini Deo.—II. Cor. v. 20.
“For Christ, we beseech you, be reconciled to God.”

Introduction.

Great lords do not, as a general rule, without some extraordinary reason, ask suppliantly for a favor, especially from those whom they surpass in dignity; for usually, when they require anything, they are accustomed to command rather than to beg. If the Roman emperor were to send a supplication to some of his subordinate princes, the subject of it must be some matter of the greatest importance, as is the case when he implores the assistance of the princes of the empire in great danger of war. The trumpets are sounded, my dear brethren, as I said in my last sermon, the jubilee year is announced, the vast treasury of the Church is opened, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the visible head of the Church, the Pope, has commissioned his nuncios and the bishops, priests, and preachers of the Church, and, as we shall see in the course of the sermon, has sent them to beg suppliantly of the people subject to his authority, in the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: "For Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God." Truly, there must be something of the greatest importance, for which our repentance is necessary. And so there is, my dear brethren; a great deal depends on it; so that we should make it our business to be now reconciled to God, and that, too, unanimously, without a single exception, as I shall now prove; for it is evident from what we have seen last Sunday that we do not act honestly towards our souls, if we refuse to take advantage of the golden opportunity now offered us. But that is not the most important point; for—

Plan of Discourse.

He who now refuses to be reconciled to God acts most wickedly towards all Christendom. Such is the whole subject of to-day's exhortation. Therefore, if we have true Christian blood in our veins, let us now unanimously renounce sin, and be converted to God with our whole hearts. Such shall be the conclusion.

Obtain for us grace to this end, O Mary, help of Christians! And you holy angels, protectors of the Christian Church, impel thereto those entrusted to your charge, and do not allow one of them to rest until he has obeyed your inspiration.

When all the members of a community are unanimous in working for a certain end that concerns the general welfare, and is of the utmost importance, it would be a most unbecoming and wicked thing for a citizen to refuse to assist them when he can; and he who actually refuses his help under such circumstances,

He is a worthless citizen who does not join in the general

effort for
the com-
mon weal.

ought to be driven out of the community as an unworthy member, who takes such little interest in the general welfare that, as far as he is concerned, he would let it go to ruin through sheer laziness. For a community constitutes a moral body, of which each inhabitant is a member. Now St. Paul warns us "that there might be no schism in the body, but the members might be mutually careful one for another. And if one member suffer anything, all the members suffer with it; or if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it."¹ Experience teaches the truth of this; if we knock our foot against a stone, all the members of the body which can help it are at once uneasy and restless, and anxious to render assistance; the hands are stretched out to protect the wounded member; the eyes look to see where it is hurt; the mouth contracts with pain, and commences to lament and sigh; the whole body quivers with sympathy. And yet, it is only the foot, the lowest member of the body, that is hurt; what would it then be, if a nobler part were injured? Oh! in order to preserve that, every other member must be ready at once to sacrifice itself. How readily does not a man stretch forth his hand to be cut off, if amputation is necessary to preserve the life of the body! And how much more eagerly still do not all the members assist each other mutually, when there is no other means of warding off death!

Reconcili-
ation with
God is now
offered to
all Chris-
tian sto-
gether.

My dear brethren, to whom is the jubilee proclaimed this year? Who are recommended by the Vicar of Jesus Christ to use the treasures of grace now opened to them, and to be reconciled to God? Is it, perhaps, only a few members of that mystic body, the Catholic Church? Or perhaps only the inhabitants of a certain town, or country? If the jubilee were proclaimed only for the people of this archdiocese of Treves, certainly there should not be one in the whole land who would not join with the others in profiting of it. But as a matter of fact, the jubilee is proclaimed for the whole Christian world, and every Catholic on earth is invited to take advantage of it. "To each and every one of the faithful of both sexes, wherever they may be," such are the words of the Papal Bull.² All the patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, prelates, and all ecclesiastical superiors, wherever they may be, are solemnly commanded, in virtue of the obedience they owe the Church, to announce this jubilee without delay to their

¹ Ut non sit schisma in corpore, sed id ipsum pro invicem sollicita sint membra; si quid patitur unum membrum, compatiuntur omnia membra; sive gloriatur unum membrum, congaudent omnia membra.—I. Cor. xii. 25, 26.

² Universis et singulis Christianis ubique degentibus.

subjects. In all lands and parts of the world where the true Catholic faith flourishes, in due obedience to the see of Rome, this jubilee is either already announced, or will be announced in a short time; all without exception are invited to be reconciled to God.

Therefore no one who wishes to be esteemed a sincere member of the Christian fold and community will refuse to take part in this holy undertaking; and he who does not now endeavor to be truly reconciled to God acts most unbecomingly. The blind man, as St. Luke tells us, was sitting by the wayside, begging; "when he heard the multitude passing by, he asked what this meant. And they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he cried out, saying: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."¹ Christians, who have perhaps hitherto lived in the state of sin, without purposing repentance or amendment, or who have through love of your blindness not made any effort to repent, hear what is now going on in the whole Christian world; how the people assemble everywhere to hold processions in the public streets; how they visit the churches and besiege the confessionals in order to disclose their sins. If you ask what is the meaning of that, you will be told that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by, that He has offered full pardon of their sins to all men, and that the Vicar of Jesus Christ has gathered together his whole flock, that they may all be reconciled to God. To work, then, at once; this concerns you! You, too, are members of the flock; cry and call out with penitent hearts, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

So that he
who refuses
it acts
wickedly.

That blind man would have had some excuse if he had not cried out for mercy; for those who were then following Christ, and amongst them even the Apostles and disciples, were displeased with him, and told him to hold his peace: "And they that went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace."² Nevertheless, he cried out more eagerly, that he might be cured of his blindness: "But he cried out much more: Son of David, have mercy on me."³ Sinner, you should long ago have called out to God for mercy, and have endeavored to regain His friendship; but perhaps other men stood in your way; the people with whom you associated, by their bad example or advice, may

Although he
is encour-
aged by the
example of
all to accept
the offer.

¹ Cum audiret tubam prætereuntem, interrogabat quid hoc esset. Dixerunt autem ei, quod Jesus Nazarenus transiret. Et clamavit dicens: Jesu, fili David, miserere mei.—Luke xviii. 36-38.

² Et qui præibant, increpabant eum ut taceret.—Ibid. 39.

³ Ipse vero multo magis clamabat: Fili David, miserere mei.—Ibid.

have prevented you from asking for mercy, because they were addicted to the same vices as you. But now, there is no one to prevent you from being converted; the priests await you in the confessional to absolve you from your sins; all true Catholics throughout the world are now following Jesus Christ, and by their example are encouraging you to cry out for mercy, to confess your sins, and to be reconciled to God. Will you, then, be the only one amongst so many to refuse to take part in such a holy work? Will you be the only rotten member in the mystic body of the Church of God? If so, then I say again that you act most unbecomingly and wickedly.

It is important for the Church at large that all should now be reconciled to God.

And in order to make this clear to you, what is the end for which this jubilee is proclaimed? Why are all Catholics invited to be reconciled to God? For the general good and advantage of all Christendom in the four quarters of the globe, to which Christendom you, too, belong. It is true that every plenary indulgence is an exceeding great treasure that takes away at once all the temporal punishment due to him who gains it; and therefore, many might think, and, indeed, we often hear people say, what is the special good of a jubilee? Nearly every Sunday in the year we can gain a plenary indulgence, and that has the same effect as the jubilee. That is quite true, as far as each individual soul is concerned; still, there is a vast difference between the two, when we consider the relative importance of the ends for which they are granted. A plenary indulgence, such as one may gain during the year in the ordinary way, is conceded to a certain church or chapel, in order to encourage a certain devotion or confidence in a certain saint; such is the whole object of it. But the jubilee has a far more extended object in view; it is of the greatest importance to the Church at large that we should all gain this plenary indulgence. There is a storm threatening the bark of Peter, my dear brethren; it will not, indeed, be able to sink it, for the Infallible Truth has assured us that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it;"¹ but it is a storm that will cause the Church much trouble and uneasiness; a conflagration is now menacing Catholic Christendom that can be extinguished only by general penance and reconciliation with God.

On account of the troubles that menace the Church.

Read, if you know Latin enough for the purpose, the text of the Bull announcing this jubilee. Ah, how the newly-elected Pope laments that God has placed such a burden on his shoulders in the present troublous times! And it is to find some support in

¹ Portæ inferi non prævalebunt adversus eam.—Matt. xvi. 18.

bearing that burden that he now begs the penance and prayers of all Christians. I could not restrain my tears when I read the words of the Bull. "Fear and trembling are come upon me," it says, "at hearing Thy voice, O Lord, calling me to this office. O Lord, I have heard Thy hearing and was afraid, when I remembered the troubled and wretched state of the times, and the difficulties, anxieties, wants, and dangers that surround us on all sides; and, what is worst of all, the holy Church of God is torn and dismembered by so many heresies, and dishonored by the vices of her own children, who depart so widely from the example of Jesus Christ, that we have reason to exclaim, with tears in our eyes, in the words of the Prophet, 'How is the gold become dim, the finest color is changed! the stones of the sanctuary are scattered on the top of every street!'"

Nor are these mere empty words, my dear brethren. Good reason, indeed, has the Vicar of Christ for his fear, anxiety, and lamentations. Look at the world and see in what a wretched state the Christian community is. Christian princes and potentates, who should assist the Church in maintaining peace and order, are at variance with one another, so that we are, as it were, still between the hammer and the anvil, and know not what will be the end of the present state of things. There is every appearance of a general war throughout Europe; and already swords are whetted that are intended to be steeped in the blood of the children of the Church. Errors and heresies are gaining ground everywhere, so that in many places it is not so easy to say who is a good Catholic, and who is a heretic and malcontent. Whole provinces and districts are infested with this plague; in countries that are otherwise Christian, people have gone so far under the pretext of devotion and piety, that there is hardly any such thing now as frequenting the sacraments; the pastors of the Church, with their flocks, bishops, prelates, priests and religious, do not hesitate to refuse due obedience to the Head of the Church, either openly, or at least in secret and in their hearts. I will say nothing of many other shameful abuses that have crept in, even amongst children of the Church, and that are totally opposed to the holy law of Jesus Christ. All this is proof enough of the anger of God against the world, and therefore it can be taken as a presage of the punishment that He is about to inflict on it.

And the calamities impending over the world.

This it is that fills the paternal heart of the Pope with fear

To avert them, all

¹ Bulla Clement. XII., anno 1730.

Catholics
are now in-
vited by
the Church
to be recon-
ciled to
God.

and anxiety ; this is the calamity he now wishes to avert by throwing open to Christians the treasures of grace that Christ has left in his charge ; this is the end of the prayers and entreaties he addresses to all ecclesiastical superiors and to those who have the charge of souls: to encourage their flocks by word and example to do true penance for their sins, and to lead real Christian lives ; to all religious of both sexes, not to cease praying night and day for help for the Church in her difficulties, and finally to all the faithful, “ that, having laid down the burden of our sins by repentance, we may with sincere hearts and devout prayers, accompanied by fasting and alms-deeds, implore the divine assistance. Let us, then, unite in praying that the God of peace may reconcile Christian potentates, humble the enemies of the Church, destroy heresies, cause the contumacious and disobedient to turn from the way of error and obstinacy and come back to the fold of the Church, avert the scourge from His people, and, according to His great mercy, free all from punishment and danger.” Such are the words of the papal Bull.

Nor should
any one re-
fuse this
invitation,
because
even one
sinner can
draw down
the wrath of
God on the
people.

From this, my dear brethren, you can see whether we have not cause now, more than ever, to be all without exception fully reconciled to God, and whether he is not truly wicked and impious who now refuses to repent of his sins and to amend his vicious life, although so much depends on his amendment. Ah, are we Christians in reality ? If so, how is it that we have no hearts to feel for the blood of so many fellow-Christians, which is in the greatest danger of being shed in torrents ? no hearts to sorrow for the loss of so many precious souls, ransomed by the blood of Jesus Christ, which are now on the high road to eternal ruin in the darkness of error, schism, and heresy ? no hearts to deplore the great calamities that now threaten to overrun all Christendom ? But it is certain that there is no better means of averting those evils than for us all to unite in being reconciled to God by true penance. In being reconciled to God, I say ; for, according to the general teaching of the holy Fathers, never is a country afflicted with public calamities, unless on account of the vices and sins of its people ; and when the latter amend their lives, God is, as it were, forced, according to His promise, to sheathe the sword that He had drawn to avenge Himself. I say, further, that we must all unite in being reconciled to God by true penance : for even the vices of one town (I am not saying half enough), even the vices of one sinner are enough to draw down the divine punishments on a whole community.

When I read the Book of Josue, I am surprised to find how all the people of Israel incurred the wrath of God and lost the protection He had hitherto afforded them : “ And the Lord was angry against the children of Israel.” Josue, their leader, had sent three thousand men to take Hai, a small town ; “ There went up, therefore, three thousand fighting men.”¹ But how did they fare? They were attacked by the few inhabitants of the place, shamefully routed, and many of them put to the sword : “ Who immediately turned their backs, and were defeated by the men of the city of Hai ; and the enemies pursued them from the gate as far as Sabarim, and they slew them as they fled by the descent : and the heart of the people was struck with fear and melted like water.”² Josue, dismayed at this calamity, rent his garments, fell prostrate on the ground, and complained bitterly to God of the shameful overthrow of the people : “ Alas, O Lord God, why wouldst Thou bring this people over the river Jordan, to deliver us into the hands of the Amorrites and to destroy us? My Lord God, what shall I say, seeing Israel turning their backs to their enemies? The Chanaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and being gathered together, will surround us, and cut off our name from the earth.”³ “ Israel hath sinned,” answered the Lord ; I will not help you now. “ Neither can Israel stand before his enemies, but he shall flee from them ; because he is defiled with the anathema ; I will be no more with you, till you destroy him that is guilty of this wickedness.”⁴ How, then, had the people sinned? There was but one man amongst them who had provoked the anger of the Lord : “ Achan, the son of Charmi, took something of the anathema,”⁵ and for that the whole nation had to suffer : “ And the Lord was angry against the children of Israel,”⁶ nor was He appeased until the guilty man had been punished as he deserved. “ Where Josue said : Because thou hast troubled us,

¹ Ascenderunt ergo tria millia pugnatorum.—Jos. vii. 4.

² Qui statim terga vertentes, percussi sunt a viris urbis Hai ; persecutique sunt eos adversarii de porta usque ad Sabarim, et ceciderunt per prona fugientes, pertimuitque cor populi, et instar aque liquefactum est.—Ibid. 4, 5.

³ Heu Domine Deus ! quid voluisti traducere populum istum Jordanem fluvium, ut traderes nos in manus Amorrhæi, et perderes ? Mi Domine Deus ! quid dicam, videns Israelem hostibus suis terga vertentem ? Audient Chananæi et omnes habitatores terre, et pariter conglobati circumdabunt nos, atque delebunt nomen nostrum de terra.—Ibid. 7, 8, 9.

⁴ Peccavit Israel, et prævaricatus est pactum meum : nec poterit Israel stare ante hostes suos, eosque fugiet, quia pollutus est anathemate. Non ero ultra vobiscum ; donec conteratis eum, qui hujus sceleris reus est.—Ibid. 11, 12.

⁵ Achan, filius Charmi, tulit aliquid de anathemate.—Ibid. 1.

⁶ Iratusque est Dominus contra filios Israel.—Ibid.

the Lord trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him ; and all things that were his were consumed with fire. And the wrath of the Lord was turned away from them.”¹

Still more do I wonder at that extraordinary tempest described by St. Matthew. Jesus embarked with His disciples, and hardly had they left the shore, when, as the Evangelist says, “ Behold, a great tempest arose in the sea ; ”² the wind roared and howled, and the rising waves tossed the vessel about like a cork, “ so that the boat was covered with waves,”³ and was almost submerged. Now, I cannot help thinking, should not the heavens have been ashamed to rage so violently against the boat in which was Jesus, the Son of God, along with the apostles, the future pillars of the Church ? How could the waves dare to vent their wrath on Him who had set bounds to their fury ? Could the vessel which bore the almighty and sovereign God be really in danger of sinking ? It does not surprise me that the vessel in which Jonas embarked was near being lost, for in it was a disobedient servant, who refused to do the will of God. But that the ship which carried such a holy company should be in danger appears incomprehensible, and yet the danger was so imminent that the disciples all cried out, almost in despair : “ Lord, save us, we perish.”⁴ What could have been the cause of their peril ? We have reason for fear and trembling, my dear brethren, when we hear St. Ambrose’s explanation of it : “ The cause of the danger,” he says, “ was this : Simon Peter was in the vessel ; but the traitor Judas was with him. When Peter embarks alone, the sea is tranquil ; but when Judas joins him, the storm comes on, although Jesus, the Son of God, is with him.”⁵ Great God ! if Achan alone was able to draw down the wrath of God on the people of Israel, if Judas alone was the cause of the tempest that threatened to submerge the bark of Christ, what mischief may not be done in our own times to the Church of Christ, which is represented by the boat, by so many secret thieves like Achan, by so many traitors like Judas, by so many wicked and vicious Christians ! Therefore, sinners ! “ For Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God ; ” we beg of you, in

¹ Ubi dixit Josue : quia turbasti nos, exturbet te Dominus in die hac. Lapidavitque eum omnis Israel, et cuncta quæ illius erant, igne consumpta sunt ; et aversus est furor Domini ab eis.—Jos. vii. 25, 26.

² Et ecce motus magnus factus est in mari.—Matt. viii. 24.

³ Ita ut navicula operiretur fluctibus.—Ibid.

⁴ Domine, salva nos, perimus.—Ibid. 25.

⁵ Hæc est causa periculi ; erat in navi Simon Petrus ; sed erat pariter et proditor Judas. Tranquillitas est, ubi solus Petrus navigat ; tempestas est, ubi Judas adjungitur.

the face of the danger that threatens us, to be reconciled to God, all of you, without exception.

But I am afraid that there will be, not one, but many Christians who will take but little interest in the general welfare of Christendom, and will hardly bestow a thought on the necessity of being converted and reconciled to God. I read that in the old heathen times there was a coarse, boorish fellow, named Cyclops, who always refused to take part in the sacrifices that were offered to the gods; when remonstrated with on his conduct, he would answer, "I do not fear the thunder-bolts of Jove, nor do I expect him to send down a shower of gold on me;" let what will happen, I do not intend to take part in the sacrifice. Ah, would to God that there were not many amongst Christians nowadays, who are just as boorish and senseless; who, as they attach little importance to the divine service during the year, and seldom hear sermons or go to the sacraments, so, too, at the present time, are but little interested in the general jubilee! They have not been accustomed to keep their unruly passions in check, as they have been for a long time indulging in a certain vice, or else they cannot make up their minds to restore ill-gotten goods, or to be reconciled to those with whom they have been at enmity, or to avoid the proximate occasion of sin, and the improper intimacy which has become a second nature to them, or to confess a sin that they have been concealing for years through shame, or to prepare themselves properly for confession, that they may not make bad confessions and Communion; and now their consciences have become callous, so that they are determined to continue in their wicked ways, saying or thinking to themselves: let others do as they will, they have no right to dictate to me; I am able to look after myself; I am not afraid of threats, they are only empty talk; the thunder-bolt has not fallen on me yet, and what is it to me whether there is peace or war in the world? I cannot do anything to prevent it. And if the Church suffers from dissensions and heresies, let those look to it who are to blame for it. What have I to do with the souls of others? If they wish to go to hell, it is their own affair. I do not dread God's anger nor His punishments; nor do I want His golden showers, the treasures of His grace. Wicked mouth, that dares to speak in that way! And such is your language, if not in words, at least in action. O sinner! whoever you be, that now refuse to be converted and to

So that he who still refuses under such circumstances is a most intolerable wretch.

Nec Jovis timeo fulmina, nec auream exspecto pluviam.

share in the general spirit of true repentance. I do not want the jubilee, you say, nor a plenary indulgence, nor to be reconciled to God, nor, as far as it depends on me, to appease the anger of God against the world, or to avert the calamities that now threaten Christendom. I will not do penance, nor amend my life, nor make restitution, nor pardon my enemy, nor renounce my evil habits, nor leave the occasion of sin; I will not give notice to that man in whose service I am, nor turn that person out of my house; I will remain as I am. What a shame for a Christian to talk in that way! Such a man is not worthy of life!

And must expect the divine malediction.

Hear, and tremble when you hear, you who thus think and say, at least with your actions; tremble when you hear what God said in former times to His servant Moses during the Jewish jubilee year. Go, He said, and declare to the children of Israel in My name, that, "the Day of Atonement shall be most solemn, and shall be called holy: and you shall afflict your souls on that day;" that is, you must repent of your sins with sorrow of heart, "and shall offer a holocaust to the Lord. . . because it is a day of propitiation, that the Lord your God may be merciful unto you."¹ And, moreover, declare woe to him who does not on that day unite with the others in doing penance for his sins: "Every soul that is not afflicted on this day shall perish from among his people."² Impenitent Christians! the Jewish day of atonement was but a shadow of our jubilee; now, if a Jew was cursed by God for refusing to do penance on that day, what will you have to expect, for now excluding yourself from the number of all good Christians, and rejecting the reconciliation and friendship that God offers you? Your soul will perish and be lost from among your people.

Entreaty and exhortation to all to be reconciled to God.

Ah, my dear brethren, let not that be the case with us! "Having then by true penance," I conclude in the words of the Vicar of Christ, "laid aside the burden of our sins, let us with heart-felt and unanimous prayer implore the divine help and mercy."³ Let every member, without exception, labor for the preservation and welfare of the whole body; let there not be one amongst us to whose obstinacy and impenitence the whole of

Dies expiationum erit celeberrimus, et vocabitur sanctus; affligetisque animas vestras in eo, et offeretis holocaustum Domino; quia dies propitiationis est, ut propitiatur vobis Dominus Deus vester.—Levit. xxiii. 27, 28.

¹ Omnis anima quæ afflicta non fuerit die hac, peribet de populis suis. — Ibid. 29.

³ Deposito itaque per veram penitentiam peccatorum pondere, sinceris concordibusque suffragiis imploremus.

Christendom may one day before the judgment-seat attribute the woes and calamities it has had to suffer. "For Christ, we beseech you," O sinner! we beg and implore of you for the sake of the Church at large, "be reconciled to God." Precious souls, beloved souls, give yourselves back to Him who alone has a right to you! Give yourselves back to your Creator, who has made you to His own image! to your Redeemer, who has bought you with His precious Blood! to that God who now calls to you, offers you His grace and favor in abundance, and, as it were, compels you to accept it! God calls you; why do you delay, and put off repentance? He is ready to remit all the debts of punishment you owe Him; why do you not hasten to accept His offer? You are now slaves of the devil, but He is willing to adopt you as His children; will you not profit by His goodness? Our own fatherland, the whole of Europe, and Catholic Christendom throughout the world are now stretching forth their hands to you, earnestly imploring you to help them; will you refuse?

You intend some day or other to give up sin; "why do you not do so now?"¹ I ask you in the words of St. Augustine. Such were the words that St. Augustine addressed to himself when God enlightened him as to the state of his soul, and he was on the point of being kept from doing penance by his evil inclinations. Why do you not repent now that all true Christians are endeavoring to obtain the divine mercy and are waiting most anxiously, so to speak, for your conversion? Is not sin as great and horrible a monster now, as it will be hereafter? You intend freeing yourselves one day from the hateful yoke of the devil; why do you not do it now, when freedom is offered to all prisoners? Or is the fire of hell not yet hot enough for you? You wish, before you die, to enter on the path that leads to heaven; why not now? The gate is always open. Or is heaven not beautiful enough for you yet? You intend sooner or later to love God with your whole heart and to serve Him as you ought; why not now, when everything will help you and impel you to the love and service of God? Or is the supreme Good not yet worthy of all love? And what is it that keeps you from being reconciled to such a good God? Is it a worthless bit of money, that you have acquired unjustly, and have hitherto kept possession of? But you must make restitution some time or other, or else you cannot go to heaven; why not do it at once, then? Is it some

And that,
too, at once.

Quare non modo?

wretched creature who has entangled your heart in the meshes of impure love? But you must give up that attachment sooner or later, or else you cannot expect to save your soul; why not do so at once? Is it some inveterate bad habit that you have not yet tried to overcome? But you must overcome it, or else there will be no hope of salvation for you; why, then, not at once? It will be much more difficult for you to do so later on, when the habit will have taken deeper root, and have grown stronger by repeated sins. Is it some secret hatred of your neighbor that prevents you from observing the law of charity in his regard? But you must resolve to lay aside that enmity, or you will not go to heaven; why not do it now? Is it some disgraceful abuse that you have not yet been able to make up your mind to renounce? But you must renounce it, or you are lost forever; why not do it at once, then? In a word, you intend some day or other to do penance and to save your soul; why not do it now, when it is required not only by your own welfare, but also by that of all Christendom?

Conclusion
and resolution.

Yes, O God of goodness, I will not delay any longer! I will be reconciled to Thee at this most favorable time with my whole heart; there is still a week left in which Thou wilt offer me the treasures of thy grace, and during that time I am determined to do true penance. I must not, cannot, will not be the only one in the whole Christian world to disturb the joy and exultation of this jubilee, and to oppose the important objects that the Church of God and the Christian community have in view; otherwise I should deserve to have them all rise up against me and expel me from their midst as a monster. No, far be that from me! I will do penance and do it sincerely; I will be sorry for all my sins, and confess them most minutely with the irrevocable resolution never to abandon Thee again, so that I may unite with others in appeasing Thy just anger, and in averting from myself and all Christians the dangers that threaten us. Sinners, if any be present here, let such be your firm resolution. Amen.

SIXTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE DEPLORABLE STATE OF THOSE WHO REFUSE TO BE CONVERTED DURING THE TIME OF THE JUBILEE; AND ON THE MOTIVES THAT ALL OTHERS HAVE TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO PERSEVERE IN GOOD.

Subject.

1. Deplorable is the state of those who now refuse to be truly converted. 2. A congratulation addressed to those who have shared in the graces bestowed during this time, and an exhortation to them to persevere.—*Preached on the last Sunday after Pentecost, which was the end of the Jubilee.*

Text.

Qui in agro, non revertatur tollere tunicam suam.—Matt. xxiv.
18.

“He that is in the field, let him not go back to take his coat.”

Introduction.

I find that the spouse of the Canticles follows the exhortation of Our Lord in to-day's gospel to leave certain things: “I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on?”¹ What are we to understand here by the word garment? The old man with his wicked works, says St. Paul: “Stripping yourselves of the old man with his deeds, an putting on the new.”² It is the fleshly garment of cupidity, says St. Jude: “Hating also the spotted garment which is carnal.”³ In a word, the garment that we must not put on again means the sins we have committed, which hang round many a soul like a coat. “He speaks of guilt as a coat,”⁴ says Mendoza. Praise and thanks be to God, my dear brethren, we have laid aside this garment of sin during the jubilee, of which this is the last day; we are now truly reconciled to God; we are saved from the slavery of hell and restored to the glorious freedom of the children of God! We thank Thee, O God, and praise Thee! There is but one thing left for us now to do: “He that is in the field, let him not go back to take his coat;” he who has put off the old man, and has received the

¹ Exspoliavi me tunica mea, quomodo induar illa?—Cant. v. 3.

² Exspoliantes vos veterem hominem cum actibus suis, et induentes novum.—Coloss. iii. 9,
10.

³ O-hientes et eam, quæ carnalis est, maculatam tunicam.—Jude i. 23.

⁴ Cul-pam vocat tunicam.

beautiful garment of sanctifying grace, must not go back again to his former sins. Yet perhaps I am rejoicing too soon. For I am afraid that, in spite of the golden opportunity offered them, not all have fully laid aside the garment of sin. I have, then, two kinds of people to deal with.

Plan of Discourse.

Therefore I bewail with heartfelt pity the unhappy state of those who have not been converted to God during this time of the jubilee ; and that I shall do in the first part of this exhortation. I congratulate with my whole heart those who by true penance have profited by the graces bestowed during this time, and I exhort them earnestly not to return to their former sins ; this I shall do in the second part. My object is, to inspire the former with a salutary fear, and to encourage the latter to persevere in the service of God.

Grant this grace to both, O God of goodness and mercy; we beg it of Thee through the powerful intercession of Thy Mother and ours, and also through the merits of our holy guardian angels.

Not every-
one who
has per-
formed the
pious works
prescribed
has gained
the jubilee.
Shown by a
smile.

When we consider what a number of people visited the churches, fasted, prayed, gave alms, and went to confession and Communion during the jubilee, we might imagine that there is no need of the first part of my sermon; for there is hardly a Catholic in this part of the country who has not done his duty in that respect, and fulfilled the necessary conditions, outwardly at least. But, alas, it is not in the outward act that true reconciliation with God consists. Christian works of penance, how manifold you are! Sacred tribunals of penance, how many enter you to confess their sins, and who yet come away more heavily burdened than when they entered! For the penance done by many is only a sham penance, like the sham battles in which soldiers sometimes engage; you may see some thousands of men on foot and on horseback, attacking each other; they rush at each other with drawn swords; you may hear the report of the muskets, the roar of the cannon and field-pieces; the sky is darkened by the smoke, and there is no end of noise and tumult. What is the meaning of it all? one might ask, who happens to come up and to see the affair; is it a real battle? Alas, if so, how many a brave hero will lose his life; how much blood will be shed! But there is no reason for such concern: not a drop of blood will be spilt, nor will a man lose

his life; they are firing only blank cartridges, powder without ball; it is only a sham battle, a review, a sort of military spectacle got up to amuse some great man. For, after the soldiers have fought thus for a time, till one side has apparently fled before the other, they are again good friends as before, and eat and drink with each other; the battle is won on one side and lost on the other, without a drop of blood being spilt on either side.

Such, too, is unfortunately the character of the repentance and conversion of many Christians. A jubilee is proclaimed, or public penance is announced during some calamity; the people flock together; they fill the churches; they fall on their knees, and strike their breasts, and cry out for mercy and pardon; the confessionals are besieged; the table of the Lord is surrounded with communicants; the Blessed Sacrament is carried through the streets in procession, etc. What a beautiful sight! No doubt, an end will be put to all sin and vice! Ah, would to God that it were so! But with many the whole affair is only a sham; their sole object is to do as others do, so as not to get a bad name; they go to confession, but without true contrition and firm purpose of amendment; and where are the signs of true conversion they give? Have they renounced that unlawful intimacy? or abandoned the occasion of sin? or extinguished the flames of impure passion? Is the person with whom sin has so often been committed banished from the house? Are the injuries received pardoned from the heart? Is that long-standing hatred given up? Are neighbors, friends, relatives, or married people, who have been hitherto living in dissension and strife, now reconciled to each other, so that they live in charity and union? Is restitution made of the gain that has been acquired unjustly, of that purchase that has been made unlawfully from a thief, of that unjust advantage, that must be attributed to unlawful bribery, of the money that has been accumulated by usury? Is the stumbling-block removed out of the way? Are those indecent statues and pictures banished from houses and gardens? Are immodest songs and love-tales burnt? Is that indecent style of dress abandoned? Is there an end of the habit of cursing and swearing, of scandal-mongering and detraction? Are other un-Christian abuses abolished? No; I am afraid that in the case of many who do penance all these things remain unchanged. But is that the way to be reconciled to God? Is that a sign of an earnest will and firm purpose to amend one's

The conversion of many was merely a sham.

sinful life? If to gain a jubilee or other plenary indulgence it is necessary to have a firm determination at the present time not to commit in future even a deliberate venial sin, what advantage can they hope for, who are still really resolved to continue in those sinful habits? Oh, no; such people are only sham penitents; they have not derived the least advantage for their souls from all their pious works during this time of grace; they are still in the slavery of the devil, bound with the same chains as before; they are as deeply indebted as ever, and their confessions and Communions have only had the effect of adding to their sins.

Their state
is deplor-
able.
Shown from
Scripture by
similes.

Reason enough, then, have I to deplore their condition. Unhappy people that you are! what have you lost? Woe to you, what is your condition in the sight of God? In the Old Law, according to divine command, the clothes of a leper were to be brought to the priest. "If it be infected with a white or red spot, it shall be accounted the leprosy, and shall be showed to the priest; and he shall look upon it and shall shut it up seven days: and on the seventh day, when he looketh on it again, if he find that it is grown, it is a fixed leprosy: he shall judge the garment unclean, and everything wherein it shall be found, and therefore it shall be burnt with fire."¹ "Son of man," said the Lord to the Prophet Ezechiel, "write thee the name of this day."² Why? O Lord. Behold this pot and see how full of rust it is. "Great pains have been taken, and the great rust thereof is not gone out," in spite of all that has been done to clean it; therefore, "thy uncleanness is execrable; because I desired to cleanse thee; and thou art not cleansed from thy filthiness: neither shalt thou be cleansed, before I cause my indignation to rest in thee: I will not pass by, nor spare, nor be pacified: I will judge thee according to thy ways, and according to thy doings, saith the Lord."³ I hear our meek Saviour Himself crying out with tearful eyes over the ungrateful city of Jerusalem: "If thou also hadst known and that in this thy day, the things that are to

¹ Si alba vel rufa macula fuerit infecta, lepra reputabitur, ostendeturque sacerdoti; qui consideratam recludet septem diebus: et die septimo rursus aspiciens, si deprehenderit crevisse, lepra perseverans est: pollutum judicabit vestimentum, et omne in quo fuerit inventa, et ideo comburetur flammis.—Levit. xiii. 49—52.

² Fili hominis; scribe tibi nomen diei hujus.—Ezech. xlv. 2.

³ Multo labore sudatum est, et non exivit de ea nimia rubigo ejus: immunditia tua execrabilis; quia mundare te volui, et non es mundata a sordibus tuis; sed nec munda-beris prius, donec quiescere faciam indignationem meam in te. Non transam, nec parcam, nec placabor. Juxta vias tuas et juxta adinventiones tuas judicabo te, dicit Dominus.—Ibid. 12—14.

thy peace;" but since thou hast rejected the light, "the days shall come upon thee, and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round; and straiten thee on every side; because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation."¹ "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not? Behold, your house shall be left to you desolate. For I say to you, you shall not see Me henceforth."²

Sinner, are not all these so many pictures of your obstinate impenitence? You are the leper on whom the waters of grace have been poured in such abundance, to cleanse you from your revolting malady. This is already the fifteenth day on which the source of divine grace has been flowing towards you, so that, if you wished, you might have drawn copiously from it. Many others have used it to purify their souls from the stain of sin; but you, instead of being cleansed, have only become more filthy. Alas, that is a bad sign! Your leprosy is fixed and incurable, and therefore it must be burned with fire; you are in imminent danger of being cast into hell. You are the rusty pot, says St. Augustine; Jesus Christ has given the infinite merits of His sweat and blood to cleanse you, but all to no purpose; "thy uncleanness is execrable; because I desired to cleanse thee, and thou art not cleansed from thy filthiness: I will not pass by, nor spare, nor be pacified: I will judge thee according to thy ways and according to thy doings." Your soul is the ungrateful and hardened city of Jerusalem, which drew tears of pity from the eyes of Our Lord. Ah, if you had only known in this day of grace, which is granted for your salvation as well as for that of others! But you have allowed that day to pass by without profiting by it, and "your house shall be left to you desolate." Reason enough have you to fear that your angry God will withdraw from you altogether the grace of conversion and amendment.

And they have reason to fear that God will refuse them His grace in future.

And to take a common sense view of the matter, you see in the street a poor beggar, who is gnawing at a mouldy piece of bread; moved with pity, you say to him: come my good friend, come home with me; I will give you food and clothing for the

For it makes one inexorable to have the benefits he offered re-

¹ Quia si cognovisses et tu, et quidem in hac die tua, quæ ad pacem tibi: venient dies in te, et circumdabunt te inimici tui vallo, et circumdabunt te, et coangustabunt te undique; eo quod non cognoveris tempus visitationis tue.—Luke. xix. 42-44.

² Jerusalem, Jerusalem, quoties volui congregare filios tuos, quemadmodum gallina congregat pullos suos sub alas: et noluit? Ecce relinquitur vobis domus vestra deserta: dico enim vobis, non me vid- itis amodo.—Matt. xxiii. 37-38.

jected and
despised.

remainder of your days, so that you will not be any longer obliged to beg your bread. But he shakes his head and says to you in a sulky tone: go your way; I do not want your food and clothing; I would prefer to beg my bread; if I knock at your door, you can give me something. Oh, you would exclaim, is that the way with you? If so, then you may knock a long time at my door before I will give you anything, since you have refused the favor I now offer you. You have a debtor who owes you a few hundred dollars; after dunning him for a long time, you see that he has nothing to give you, and moved by Christian charity, you remit the debt; here, my good friend, you say to him, here is your acknowledgment; you can tear it up if you wish; I will not ask for payment. But he, not to be under a compliment to you, refuses to have the debt remitted, and maintains that he is determined to pay it. Very well, then, you say to him; if you are so independent about it, you can and must pay me to the last farthing, and at the proper time; nor need you expect the least mercy from me; for if you do not pay the full amount of your debt when it falls due, I will have you imprisoned without delay. And you would be right in both cases; for when he who wishes to do a kindness to another sees that his offer is rejected and treated with contempt, he has good cause for anger and resentment against the person who acts so unworthily towards him.

The sinner
has already
often de-
spised the
graces of-
fered him
by God.

See now, O Christian, whether you do not act in the same way towards your God. What great and generous alms He has offered us poor mortals during the time of the jubilee! What vast debts He has been willing to remit completely and gratuitously! I have explained all this sufficiently already. Truly, that grace and goodness is so great that, if I could announce to the damned souls in hell that it would be offered to them after as many years as it would take a sparrow to drink the ocean dry, they would at once change their curses and blasphemies into singing the praises of God, and would be filled with joy in the midst of their torments. Such was the grace that you, who refused to be converted, rejected; and by your conduct you said to the almighty God: I do not want the generous alms you offer me; I do not wish to have my debts forgiven; keep your graces and favors until I ask for them. Do you look on that as a good way to induce Him to bestow His grace on you in the future? Are you not among the number of those of whom the Lord complains by the Prophet Isaias, "Hear, O ye heavens, and give

ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken. I have brought up children, and exalted them; but they have despised Me,"¹ they have rejected and disregarded the benefits I offered them.

But, you maintain, if it was a grace that was offered me during the jubilee, I was not bound to accept it. I can repent of and confess my sins another time and be truly reconciled to God. Can you, indeed? Do you really believe that the God you have so often despised and treated with such contempt will be ready at your beck and call whenever you wish? "I called, and you refused," He will say;² I frequently offered to be your friend, but you would not accept My offer; now it is My turn to refuse. You were not obliged to profit by the grace and favor I was ready to bestow on you, nor am I now obliged to offer you any further graces; "I, also, will laugh in your destruction."³ At some future time I will do penance and be really reconciled to God. Eh? You speak as if you had the future locked up in a box, so that you could take it out and use it as you please! How do you know how many years, months, days, or hours you have yet to live? Oh, how many hundreds and thousands of souls there are for whom this jubilee year will be the last of their lives! Perhaps this is the last call you will get, the last opportunity of doing penance, the last grace of conversion that will be offered you, so that you will in vain expect any more favors of the kind from God.

So that in all probability he cannot expect any more.

Father Christopher Vega, of our Society, relates that on one occasion, when some missionary priests had announced a jubilee, a wicked young man made fun of them and cried out: what jubilee and plenary indulgence are you talking of? There is no danger of my troubling you, even if you brought a hundred jubilees; I do not intend to be converted yet, as I mean to live a good while longer. Such was the presumption of that wicked young man. But, O God of goodness, how great are the wonders of Thy infinite mercy! At the very moment when that wretch was thus insulting God and making a mockery of the reconciliation offered him, the Lord touched his heart during a sermon, and although he was not yet resolved on doing penance, he went away disturbed in mind. Hardly had he lain down to sleep that night, when he awoke again in a state of alarm. Do you hear nothing? said he to his wife. What is the matter? she asked;

Shown by an example.

¹ Audite cœli, et auribus percipe terra, quoniam Dominus locutus est. Filios enutrivit et exaltavi, ipsi autem spreverunt me.—Isa. i. 2.

² Vocavi, et renuistis.—Prov. i. 24.

³ Ego quoque in interitu vestro ridebo.—Ibid. 26.

everything seems to be quiet. Go to sleep and be not frightened. How can I sleep? was his answer; do you not hear the missionaries crying out to me: be converted to God! confess the sin you have concealed so long, or else to-morrow you will be in hell! In reality it was midnight, there was no one stirring in the streets, and the good Fathers were long since in bed; but as the man constantly heard the voice calling out to him, he could stand it no longer, and leaping out of bed, he ran to the house in which the missionaries were, knocked at the door and asked to see one of them. The owner of the house was vexed at being disturbed at such an hour, and told him that the Fathers were now in bed, and that, if he wished to see one of them, he should come back the next day. But the missionaries, hearing the noise at the door, were awakened, doubtless by a direct interposition of Providence in order to help a poor soul, and rising at once, they received the man with the greatest kindness. He then and there made a good confession of all his sins, including one that he had concealed for eleven years, and on the following morning, full of consolation at having got rid of the burden of his sins, he received holy Communion. And what do you think happened to him afterwards, my dear brethren? Hardly ten hours had elapsed, when he was stricken with apoplexy, and died on the spot. O soul! what a happiness for thee that thou didst hear the voice of God calling to thee! Poor soul, what would have been thy fate, hadst thou neglected the opportunity then offered thee, and deferred thy conversion even for one day!

Exhortation
to such people
to do true pen-
ance.

Therefore St. Paul warns and exhorts us all: "And we, helping, do exhort you, that you receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith: In an accepted time have I heard thee, and in the day of salvation have I helped thee. Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation."¹ Wretched sinner, do you not see the danger you run by not profiting by this day of salvation, on which the good God is ready to draw you out of the miserable state in which you are? How do you know but that this is the last time that God will wait for you to forgive your sins, and that such a time will never again be offered you? If that is the case, what will become of you? How do you know but that you will die suddenly to-day or to-morrow in

¹ *Adjuvantes autem exhortamur ne in vacuum gratiam Dei accipiat; ait enim: tempore accepto exaudi vi te, et in die salutis adjuvi te. Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile, ecce nunc dies salutis*—II. Cor. vi. 1, 2.

a fit of apoplexy, or that you will be killed by a stone falling from a roof, or that some other accident will deprive you of life? Such things have often been witnessed before now in the world. What hope is there for you then? Is it my object to drive you to despair? No, not by any means; for you have still time if you wish; to-day, this very morning, this very moment, you can be reconciled to God; and although you have no longer time to perform the works that are required to gain the indulgence of the jubilee, yet you can confess your sins with true sorrow, so as to regain the friendship of God, and you can make a more firm purpose of amendment than you have hitherto made; such, too, is the object of my exhortation and complaint. But if you refuse to do that I cannot help you, and I turn from you to those now just souls, who have taken advantage of this time of grace, and by true repentance have been reconciled to God, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

I congratulate you, then, with all my heart, on being freed by the mercy of God from the state of sin and the slavery of the devil, and being restored to the glorious liberty of the children of God, amongst whom you can now live in the enjoyment of the sweetest repose of conscience, which surpasses all the delights that the world can offer; and while you can now learn from your own experience the great difference there is between a true servant and friend of God under the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ, and the imaginary pleasure that gnaws at the conscience and fills with bitterness the heart of him who is held captive under the tyrannical yoke of the devil. “Giving thanks to God the Father,” I say with St. Paul in the epistle of to-day, “who hath made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, and the remission of sins.”¹ And what have you still to do, beloved souls? Ah, keep fast to your purpose! You are now in a most desirable state; do not again put on the garment of sin you have cast off. I beg of you, in the words of the same Apostle, “that you may walk worthy of God in all things pleasing; being fruitful in

Congratulation addressed to those who have been reconciled to God during this time of grace.

¹ *Gratias agentes Deo Patri, qui dignos nos fecit in partem sortis sanctorum in lumine; qui eripuit nos de potestate tenebrarum, et transtulit in regnum Filii dilectionis sue, in quo habemus redemptionem per sanguinem ejus, remissionem peccatorum.*—Coloss. i. 12, 13, 14.

They must overcome all temptations and remain faithful to God.

every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.”¹ Ah! this is the only thing that can cause me any trouble to-day, namely, the fear that the peace now made with God will not be of long duration with some, but that they will after a time return to their old sins and vices. I know well that the devil will not rest, but will make greater efforts and use more craft than ever to regain his power over the soul that has escaped from his clutches. Never was Laban in a greater rage, than when he found that Jacob had secretly run away from his house; never was king Pharaoh more wrathful against the Israelites, than when he discovered that they had escaped from him by flight. And so, too, never is the hellish foe more cruel and crafty, than when he is forced to submit to the loss of the authority he had over a soul. Therefore the Holy Ghost warns penitent souls by the wise Ecclesiasticus: “Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation. Wait on God with patience; join thyself to God, and endure, that thy life may be increased in the latter end. Keep His fear and grow old therein.”² And what causes me still more fear is our own inborn inconstancy, which makes it easy for us to forget our firm resolutions. The recurrence of some former occasion of sin, a pleasing object presented to our senses, some trouble or difficulty in the divine service, or even mere forgetfulness of the motives which have induced us to repent, would be quite enough to make us wallow again in the mire, and to cause all our good resolutions to vanish into thin air.

And not be like those who soon relapse into sin.

The Prophet David likens such inconstant penitents to water, when he says: “They shall come to nothing, like water running down.”³ Mark the words, “water running down.” For there is a great difference between a river and a torrent. The river flows onward, but its course is constant, because it takes its rise in some perennial spring; but it is not so with the torrent. You may remark during the winter, and sometimes also in the summer, after a heavy rain, the water flows everywhere from hills and houses into the lower ground, and the sewers of the town are as full as if there was danger of an inundation. But when

¹ Ut ambuletis digne Deo per omnia placentes; in omni opere bono fructificantes, et crescentes in scientia Dei.—Coloss. i. 10.

² Fili, accedens ad servitutem Dei, sta in iustitia et timore, et præpara animam tuam ad tentationem. Sustine sustentationes Dei; conjungere Deo et sustine, ut crescat in novissimo vita tua. Serva timorem illius, et in illo veterasce.—Ecclesi. ii. 1, 3, 6.

³ Ad nihilum devenient, tanquam aqua decurrens.—Ps. lvi. 8.

the rain has ceased for a few hours, what has become of that water? It has completely disappeared. So it is with many penitents, says St. Augustine; "the water rushes along for a while, but it soon ceases."¹ After a moving sermon, during a time of public calamity, or when public penance has been proclaimed, or during a jubilee, when graces come down from above like rain, oh, then you may hear the water rushing along! Tears of repentance fill the eyes; hearts are flooded with sorrow; but if you were to look for those torrents in a month's or a week's, nay, even in a few days' time, where would they be? "They shall come to nothing, like water running down;" there is no more trace of them; the old habits of drunkenness and sloth in the service of God, the old sins and vices have regained the upper hand. That it is, I repeat, which causes me fear and trouble, for my sake and yours, my dear brethren, for, in a short time we may act like that.

But shall we do so? Shall we break our word, and violate the fidelity that we have so solemnly sworn to observe towards God? When we undertook to do true penance for our sins, we protested before heaven that we would in future love God above all things and constantly, that we would keep all His commandments without exception most faithfully, and that we would never during our whole lives offend Him by mortal sin; and shall we now prove false to Him so soon, and say by our actions: I retract my promise; I am sorry for having made it; I wish to go back to the devil, from whom I was freed? What a shameful and disgraceful apostasy that would be! What greater disgrace can there be before the world than to have the name of a deserter, a runaway, a perjurer? An honest man, as the saying is, keeps his word. Shall we, then, begin again to persecute and trouble the good God, who has now bestowed extraordinary graces on us, and has forgiven us many grievous sins, with the punishment due to them? If we did that, would we not really say to God: Thou hast shown me great mercy a few days ago, O Lord! Thou hast poured out over me the fulness of Thy graces, but now I do not want them any more; Thou canst take them back! Thou hast admitted me into the number of Thy friends and dear children, when Thou couldst have condemned me to hell on account of my sins; but now I renounce Thy friendship and return to the slavery of the devil! Thou hast gratuitously remitted many debts I owed Thee; now I wish to begin to contract new

For that would be an act of the blackest ingratitude towards God.

¹ Ad tempus perstreptit, mox cessabit.

ones! I have hitherto often provoked Thy anger by thought, word, and deed; I have told my sins in confession, and have been absolved from them; they are all forgiven; and now I will begin again to offend Thee! Thou hast hitherto been wonderfully patient with me, and hast borne with me, although I was Thy enemy; I thank Thee for that; but now Thou canst have patience with me again; I am about to sin again! Men of honor, what do you think of that? Is it not a most hideous ingratitude, Christians?

And would
make them
worse off
than they
were before
conversion.

And what good will the treasures of grace we have received be to us, if we squander them away in that manner? "What is the use," asks St. Cyril, "of washing your garments, if you soil them again at once?"¹ Have we washed our souls with tears of penance, only to sully them again? Are we freed from slavery, only that we may have the opportunity of again delivering ourselves up to the tyrant? Have we redeemed the precious spiritual goods that we had forfeited, only to give them up again to the devil? Suppose (and may God avert it!) that one of us were to commit a deliberate mortal sin, with what confidence could he again appeal to the mercy of God, or expect forgiveness, since he so often perjured himself after repeated promises of amendment? The servant of whom St. Matthew speaks in the Gospel, and who was on the point of being imprisoned by his angry master on account of the money he owed him, fell down on his knees and begged for a respite: "That servant falling down, besought him, saying: Have patience with me and I will pay thee all."² Whereupon the master not only granted him the respite he prayed for, but also remitted the whole of the debt gratuitously: "And the lord of that servant, being moved with pity, let him go and forgave him the debt."³ But what happened to the servant, when he acted unmercifully to his fellow-servant? "And his lord being angry, delivered him to the torturers,"⁴ says the parable. Now I ask, why did not the servant beg for mercy a second time? Was it because he saw that his master was angry with him? But he was angry the first time as well, and yet the servant appeased him. Why could he not do so a second time? The ungrateful man saw with what mercy and meekness his master had first remitted his debt; but now, that

¹ Quid prodest studiosæ vestes abluere, et lotas rursum luto inquinare?

² Prociðens autem servus ille, orabat eum, dicens: patientiam habeam me, et omnia reddam tibi.—Matt. xviii. 26.

³ Misertus autem dominus servi illius, dimisit eum, et debitum dimisit ei.—Ibid. 27.

⁴ Et iratus dominus ejus tradidit eum tortoribus.—Ibid. 34.

he had despised that mercy by contracting a new debt of guilt, he did not dare to ask for forgiveness, and so he allowed himself to be given over to the torturers without saying a word. This servant is a picture of those sinners who, after having obtained from God the forgiveness of their sins, are daring enough to offend Him again. Finally, what would our repentance profit the whole Christian world, if by falling again into sin we cause to be again drawn from the scabbard the sword of vengeance that was sheathed on account of our repentance? Would not matters be even worse than before? For Our Lord says, speaking of one in whom the unclean spirit enters for the second time, after having been driven out: "And the last state of that man is made worse than the first."¹

Far be that from us, dear Christians! "He that is in the field, let him not go back to take his coat." We are free now, let none of us again put on the garment of sin that we have cast off. We will faithfully observe the fidelity we have sworn to our God, and we will say with the Spouse in the Canticles: "I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?"² She does not say, as Mendoza remarks, "I have laid down my garment," but "I have put it off." What is the difference? He who goes to bed at night lays aside his clothes with the intention of putting them on again in the morning; and therefore he puts them near his bed, that he may find them at once when he gets up. But he who puts off his clothes in the sense of the text has no intention of ever putting them on again. In the same way, then, should we put off the garment of sin, so that we may never return to it again. If temptations and dangerous occasions assail us, we will answer them as the peasant would who brings with him into town a sheep that he has already sold to one of the citizens; he is stopped by some one and asked, what does the sheep cost? It is already sold, is his answer. Another asks him, what do you ask for the sheep? It is not for sale, is again his answer. And so he goes on quietly to the house of the person who has bought the sheep. Just souls! You do not belong to yourselves: "For you are bought with a great price,"³ as St. Paul tells you. Jesus Christ has bought you with His precious Blood, of which He has now made you partakers. The enemy of your

Conclusion
and resolution to keep
always in
the friend-
ship of God.

¹ Et sunt novissima hominis illius pejora prioribus.—Matt. xii. 45.

² Lavi pedes meos, quomodo inquinabo illos.—Cant. v. 3.

³ Empti enim estis pretio magno.—I. Cor. vi. 20.

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souls will tempt you with his suggestions and ask you: what shall I give you for the sheep? for your soul? ask what you will, money and wealth, honor and a high position amongst men, carnal pleasures and the delights of impure love, etc. But you must answer him with a firm determination: away with you! my soul is not for sale; it is bought already, and at a higher price than you could give me for it! Men, too, will come with their flatteries and caresses; the person with whom you were formerly in the habit of sin will try again to lead you away from God; but you must have the same answer ready; away with you! my soul is not for sale; I have sold it to another; it now belongs to my God, and He will keep possession of it forever.

And to use
the proper
means to
that end.

And to be all the more certain of fulfilling our resolution, we must at once deprive ourselves of the power of sinning, like the Venerable Metronius, who, having firmly resolved to lead a penitent life, placed a large chain around his body, locked it, and threw the key into a river, so that, even if he wished, he could not free himself from the chain. In the same way we must get rid of all that has led us into sin in the past; we must close our eyes to all dangerous objects, our ears to all sinful discourse, our hearts to bad thoughts, and then throw away the key; that is, we must avoid with the utmost care all occasions and company that were formerly the cause of sin to us. And if we wish to find a great help to holy perseverance, let us keep always in the presence of God, have a great confidence in and devotion to the Blessed Virgin and to our holy guardian angels, go to confession and Communion at least once a month, be diligent in hearing the word of God in sermons,—for, as all acknowledge who have experience of it, that will encourage and strengthen us in good—examine our consciences every evening, say our morning prayers devoutly, and renew our good intention of not offending God for the sake of any man, or pleasure, or gain whatever. Such is my firm resolution, O God! I will keep my word and never abandon Thee as long as I live! Often enough have I angered Thee, although Thou hast never given me the least cause to do so! Often enough have I been faithless to Thee! Ah, too often! But now I am ready to suffer any evil rather than offend Thee! Death itself would I now prefer to sin! Nay, hell itself, rather than again provoke Thy anger! Trusting in Thy grace, O heavenly Father, I make this resolution as a conclusion of the jubilee, for which I now thank Thee with my whole heart. Amen.

SIXTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON PEACE BETWEEN GOD AND MEN.

Subject.

Everything now helps to move and compel us to make peace with the Lord God.—*Preached in the year 1735, on the occasion of the jubilee which was proclaimed for the purpose of obtaining peace among Christian princes.*

Text.

Pro Christo ergo legatione fungimur, tanquam Deo exhortante per nos. Obsecramus pro Christo, reconciliamini Deo.—II. Cor. v. 20.

“For Christ therefore we are ambassadors, God, as it were, exhorting by us. For Christ, we beseech you, be reconciled to God.”

Introduction.

A general peace-congress, or meeting, is to be held to-day, my dear brethren. The two contending parties between whom peace is to be made are, on the one side, God, who has been offended, and on the other, wicked men, who have to be reconciled to God. The object and fruit of this peace is to preserve and restore tranquillity to Europe. The means of securing the first peace with God, and thus rendering it easy to obtain the second from heaven, are offered us in this jubilee by our Mother, the holy Catholic Church, in her capacity as mediatrix of peace between the two parties. There is no doubt that the first peace is of the utmost importance to all men, while most of the nations of Europe are earnestly longing for the second. The means offered us by the Church are most favorable and easy; and we, as ambassadors of that Church, cry out in her name, and beg and implore of you all, in the name of Jesus Christ, to be reconciled to God and make peace with Him. But if there be any one who in such circumstances should refuse to agree to this peace, then we must look on him as one who is lost to all sense of decency. There you have without further preamble the subject of this instruction and exhortation on the present jubilee. Trusting, then, in the divine assistance, which I hope to secure by the intercession of Mary and of the angels of peace, I again beseech you for Christ, be reconciled to God.

To be at war with God is the greatest misery.

So that peace is now to be made between God and sinful man? And is much argument necessary to persuade man of the advantage of such a peace? To be in the state of sin, to wage war on the almighty and all-seeing God, to be a rebel to and a sworn enemy of the greatest Monarch, to bear about the torment of a bad conscience, which cries out unceasingly, in tones of the bitterest reproof: you have sinned grievously against God; you have made God your enemy, who, being present everywhere, can destroy you at any moment He pleases; you have lost your soul, heaven and all; you are a wretched slave of the devil, who awaits only the permission of his Creator to drag you down, body and soul, into the abyss of hell; you are a child of wrath and malediction; if you die now, and death can come to you at any moment, you are lost forever; alas! what a miserable state! Is it not surprising that a man can remain even an hour in such a state without trying to free himself from it?

While peace with Him is the greatest happiness.

On the other hand, to be at peace with God; to be in the state of sanctifying grace; to hear the consoling voice of a conscience free from sin saying, according to the testimony of St. Paul: you are a friend and dear child of God, a lawful heir to eternal glory, a co-heir with Jesus Christ your Saviour, a companion of the elect and chosen servants of God; if you were to die now, you would go to heaven; human soul, reflect on this! seek all over the world for everything that can give you pleasure; could you find anything more delightful or agreeable, than to be at peace with your God? For you have nothing to fear in life, nor in death, nor after death; there is nothing that can give you reasonable cause for alarm; but you can rejoice in the Lord your God, as in a perpetual banquet of delights, even in the midst of the greatest trials, troubles, and contradictions.

So that we should make peace with Him at once.

Sinners, we beseech you for Christ—ah, why is it necessary to beg of you to do this?—we implore of you, be reconciled to God! It is for the sake of this desirable peace that the Church has assembled us here to-day. Come, then; do not delay any longer, nor stop to deliberate as to whether you will accept the peace now offered to all. Reject forever and at once everything that has hitherto kept you at enmity with God and burdened your conscience! Away with that sinful habit, that proximate occasion, that impure intimacy, that unjust gain, that scandalous abuse! Confess your sins candidly, and amend your lives once for all! Be reconciled to God! Make peace with Him! If the only advantage to be gained thereby was that desirable

peace and friendship with the Almighty, there should not be one so obdurate and blind as to refuse it.

But what other advantage do we seek by this peace? "That Thou wouldst vouchsafe to grant peace and true concord to Christian kings and princes."¹ That is what we wish to obtain from Thee, O merciful God! that is the blessing the Church now wishes to secure by proclaiming a jubilee to the whole Christian world, namely, that the God who is so justly enraged with the world on account of our sins and vices may be appeased by our penance, our fervent and united prayers, and our sighs and cries to heaven (as the Papal Bull has it), so that He will sheathe the sword of vengeance, pacify the hearts of Christian kings and princes, whom he can govern and change as He wills, and thus free the world from the dangers of war and the other calamities that threaten it. This, I say, is the object the Church has in view in now wishing to make a general peace with God, who is offended on account of our sins.

Especially as it is a means of obtaining peace in Europe.

O Christian preachers, let us now hold our tongues, and say no more; for what is the use of our preaching and exhortation to those to whom their own unhappy experience has already preached plainly enough? In former times it was not necessary for the Prophet Isaias to preach in words to the people, to announce the punishment that was impending over them, and to exhort them to penance; for all the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem saw him going about the streets naked, according to the command of God. Nor was it necessary for the Prophet Jeremias to say a word to the Jews to threaten them with slavery and imprisonment on account of the idolatry into which they had fallen; for they all saw him wandering about laden with heavy chains. Those who witnessed the death of Our Saviour on the cross did not require a preacher in order to be moved to penance; the terror caused by the fearful darkness, the earthquake, and the rending of the rocks, was in itself a most forcible sermon, which had a great effect on many of them, so that, as St. Luke says, the greater number of them struck their breasts with sorrow of heart. "And all the multitude of them that were come together to that sight, and saw the things that were done, returned, striking their breasts."² According to the opinion of St. Jerome, many thousands of them were converted on

For which every country is longing.

¹ Ut regibus et principibus Christianis pacem et veram concordiam largiri digneris.

² Omnis turba eorum, qui simul aderant ad spectaculum istud, et videbant quæ fiebant, errutientes pectora sua, revertebantur.—Luke xxiii. 48.

the spot.¹ Equally good reason have we for believing that in our present circumstances we have no need of preachers to urge us to do penance; for necessity itself preaches to us, and compels us, as it were, to have recourse to the only means that can help us. Eloquent enough are the cries and shouts of the soldiery, that are to be heard everywhere, so that the words of the Prophet Isaias with regard to the Chaldeans besieged in Babylon are now verified. "The noise of a multitude in the mountains, as it were of many people, the noise of the sound of kings, of nations gathered together; the Lord of hosts hath given charge to the troops of war; the Lord and the instruments of His wrath, to destroy the whole land."² Eloquent enough is the Christian blood that has been shed in torrents here and there throughout the world; eloquent enough are the well filled cemeteries, the sighs and tears of oppressed citizens and peasants, who have the greatest difficulty in providing themselves with the bare necessities of life, and many of whom have lost all their worldly possessions and are reduced to extreme poverty; eloquent enough, as His Holiness the Pope complains in his Bull, is the miserable condition of so many provinces and kingdoms in the Christian world, whose resources are quite exhausted, so that they can hardly recover themselves again; in a word, the very name of war is in itself a most forcible sermon, for it is the most severe temporal punishment that an angry God can inflict on a sinful world.

For war is
the worst of
temporal
punish-
ments.

And so it is, my dear brethren; the most terrible of all public calamities is war. Pestilence and contagious diseases are a severe punishment, and so is famine and hunger; but if war once breaks out in a country, you have all those other plagues with it; for, as experience teaches, they follow in its train, as matters of necessity. All trials and contradictions, no matter what their name may be, are, indeed, punishments, but they are salutary punishments, which serve to bring men to a sense of the wickedness of their ways, and to lead them to God; but, as the old song has it, "there is no good in war;"³ instead of amending abuses, it only increases them; instead of hindering, it only encourages injustice, theft, rapine, adultery and all kinds of impurity, murder, despair, and other vices. Alas, that we should have

¹ Multaque statim de Judæis millia crediderunt.

² Vox multitudinis in montibus, quasi populorum frequentium; vox sonitus regum gentium congregatarum: Dominus exercituum præcepit militiæ belli; Dominus et vasa furoris ejus, ut disperdat omnem terram.—Isa. xlii. 4, 5.

³ Nulla salus bello.

such bitter experience of the truth of this! And consequently war is not merely a temporal punishment, as far as our mortal bodies are concerned, but it also brings with it, as a general rule, the perversion and damnation of our immortal souls. Well didst thou choose, O holy David, when God left it free to thee to select war, famine, or pestilence as a punishment! That wise king did not take long to consider, my dear brethren. If I and my people have to be chastised, he said, it is better for me to fall into the hands of God, and to choose pestilence, than to fall into the hands of men by bringing the evils of war on the land. And therefore, when the Catholic Church prays in the Litanies to be delivered from temporal evils, she mentions war last of all, as the summary of every calamity; "from pestilence, famine, and war, deliver us O Lord." ¹

In order, then, to be freed from such a grievous punishment, under which almost the whole of Christendom is now groaning, is it not right, I ask again, that we should all help as well as we can, and accept the proffered peace with God? I certainly would not wish to be in the place of that wicked citizen who in general conflagration, for instance, when every one lends a helping hand to carry water to quench the fire, stands idly looking on and laughing, while the flames spread from one house to the other, although, if he cared to help, he might save a house from destruction; for I should fear lest the people vent their just anger on me by throwing me into the flames. Such, too, is my opinion of the Christian who refuses now to help his brethren, who are crying out from all quarters to be delivered from the scourge of war. Dictys, an old historian, who was at the siege of Troy, relates that king Agamemnon loved a Trojan slave to such an extent that neither the entreaties of her father, nor the representations of the other kings, his allies, nor gold, nor threats, were capable of inducing him to give her up. The father made strenuous efforts to free his daughter, and caused great havoc among the Greeks. Then the hero Achilles brought the dead bodies of the slain Greeks to the tent of Agamemnon, and placed them there in the sight of the whole army, ² saying: behold those dead bodies, and judge whether so dear a price should be paid for a woman. What do you think of it? he then asked the soldiers. Away with her, they all cried.

Therefore all should help unanimately to avert such a calamity.

¹ A peste, fame, et bello libera nos, Domine.

² Defunctorum corpora miserandum in modum confecta, undique in conventu ante ora omnium projecit fecit.

And even Agamemnon himself, seeing the slaughter he had caused, overcame his passion and gave up the slave, for he could no longer love one who had caused the lives of so many brave men. Sinners, "for Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God!" Renounce what is displeasing to Him! And if your hearts are captivated by the attachment to some sin, which has hitherto kept you from doing penance, ah! then, let the lamentable destruction of so many, who have lost either their lives or their property in this war, influence you to give up for God's sake what has been the obstacle to your making peace with Him. We beseech you for the sake of the whole Christian world, "be reconciled to God!" Make peace with Him!

That is to be done by being truly reconciled to God, who afflicts us with war on account of our sins.

Without this peace, that other, for which we long and sigh, cannot be obtained; for who is it that sends us the scourge of war? Is it not the all-ruling God, without whose decree nothing can happen in the world? And why does He afflict us in that way? Is it not on account of the sins and vices of the people, which arouse His anger and compel Him to take the sword of vengeance in His hand? Hear the threats He utters by the Prophet Isaias: "If you be willing, and will hearken to Me, you shall eat the good things of the land: but if you will not, and will provoke Me to wrath, the sword shall devour you."¹ Who was it that caused the city of Babylon to be besieged and laid waste? "I," says the Almighty, "I have commanded My sanctified ones, and have called My strong ones in My wrath. Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them; with their arrows they shall kill the children, and shall have no pity upon the sucklings of the womb, and their eye shall not spare their sons. And that Babylon, glorious among kingdoms, the famous pride of the Chaldeans, shall be even as the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrha."² Phacee, king of Israel, had, without reason or justice on his side, begun a war against Achaz, the king of Juda, and was so successful that in one battle he slew a hundred and twenty thousand of the bravest of the Jewish soldiers: "Phacee, the son of Romelia, slew of Juda a hundred and twenty thousand in one day, all valiant men: and the children of Israel carried away of their brethren two hundred thousand women, boys, and girls,

¹ Si volueritis et audieritis me, bona terræ comedetis; quodsi nolueritis, et me ad iracundiam provocaveritis, gladius devorabit vos.—Isa. i. 19, 20.

² Ego mandavi sanctificatis meis, et vocavi fortes meos in ira mea; ecce ego suscitabo super eos Medos; sagittis parvulos interficient, et lactantibus uteris non miserebuntur, et super filios non parceret oculus eorum: et erit Babylon illa gloriosa in regnis, incluta superbia Chaldeorum, sicut subvertit Dominus Sodomam et Gomorrhā.—Ibid. xiii. 3, 17, 18, 19.

and an immense booty; and they brought it to Samaria."¹ What had the poor Jews done to the king of Israel that he should treat them so cruelly? They had done nothing to offend him, but they had sinned against God, who made use of the king of Israel to punish them; for, as the Scripture says: "They had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers."² "O thou sword of the Lord," cried out the Prophet Jeremias in similar circumstances, "how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Go into thy scabbard, rest and be still."³ But the answer he got was that it would not rest, because it had been commanded to wreak its fury on the Ascalonites, on account of the sins of the people. "How shall it be quiet, when the Lord hath given it a charge against Ascalon, and against the countries thereof by the seaside, and there hath made an appointment for it?"⁴ My dear brethren, we sometimes complain of having too much to suffer; we desire and long for rest, and we cry out, "O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet?" When shall we be delivered from this heavy burden? But if we were to consider the sins we have committed, they would answer us: "How shall it be quiet when the Lord hath given it a charge," to wreak its fury on us? They would answer us as God did the complaints of His people by the Prophet Jeremias: "Why criest thou for thy affliction? thy sorrow is incurable; for the multitude of thy iniquity, and for thy hardened sins I have done these things to thee; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with a cruel chastisement, by reason of the multitude of thy iniquities."⁵ There, Christians, is the only reason why we are now scourged by war; and as long as we are at enmity with God there is no hope of peace, or of being relieved from the burden that oppresses us. Therefore, if you wish to be at peace with men, first be reconciled to God by true penance.

And that especially since such favorable conditions are now offered to us, and since such exceptional advantages are to be gained by making peace with God; and this is the final reason which

The favorable terms on which peace is

¹ Occiditque Phacee, filius Romeliæ, de Juda centum viginti millia in die uno, omnes viros bellatores; ceperuntque filii Israel de fratribus suis ducenta millia mulierum, puerorum, et puellarum, et infinitam prædam, pertuleruntque eam in Samariam.—II. Paralip. xxviii. 6, 8.

² Eo quod reliquissent Dominum Deum patrum suorum.—Ibid. 6.

³ O mucro Domini, usquequo non quiesces? Ingredere in vaginam tuam; refrigerare et sile.—Jerem. xlvii. 6.

⁴ Quomodo quiescet, cum Dominus præceperit ei adversus Ascalonem, et adversus maritimas ejus regiones, ibique condixerit illi?—Ibid. 7.

⁵ Quid clamas super contritione tua? Insanabilis est dolor tuus; propter multitudinem iniquitatis tuæ et propter dura peccata tua feci hæc tibi. Plaga enim inimici percussit te castigatione crudeli, propter multitudinem iniquitatis tuæ.—Ibid. xxx. 15, 14.

offered us
should im-
pel us to do
this.

should move us to make it. When two potentates, who have been at war, begin to treat about making peace, their ambassadors hardly ever bring the matter to a conclusion without stipulating on both sides some conditions difficult of fulfilment; for both parties have to make concessions and to cede rights, before the treaty is finally arranged. Sinners, what difficult condition is imposed on us in the treaty we are now about to make with God for the peace of the world? (Pay attention, my dear brethren, for I am about to mention the works we must perform in order to gain the plenary indulgence of the jubilee.) We have to give up nothing except the sins which we have committed, and which still burden our consciences; and that we do by candidly and humbly confessing them, with the firm purpose of never committing them again; and after confession we receive holy Communion. Is that a difficult condition which consists in freeing one's self from the yoke of the devil, and in approaching the Table of the Lord to be fed with the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ? Have we not rather just reason to beg of God humbly and perseveringly to bestow that great favor on us? And what more have we to do? Nothing except to fast for three days, namely, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, according to the usual custom of the Church. Is that a very heavy burden? But every Christian who is bound by the law of fasting must do that during Lent and on the appointed fast-days, or else he will commit a mortal sin, so that there is absolutely nothing required of us but what we are already bound to fulfil. We must, moreover, give alms to the poor according to our means. Perhaps that is the difficulty? But again, all Christians who have superfluous wealth are bound by the law of charity, under pain of sin, to give alms. Finally, we must visit three churches appointed for the purpose, or at least we must visit one of them once, and pray devoutly at our own pleasure that God may avert the scourge of war and other calamities from suffering Christendom. Is that a heavy burden, to pray that one may be freed from grievous suffering? But that, too, we must do in any case; our own wants compel us to have recourse to prayer (mark, my dear brethren, that those works must be performed during one of the two following weeks, except the visitation of the churches, for one of the visits can be made according to each one's convenience during the fortnight of the jubilee). Those are all the conditions that we are required to fulfil.

And the
great graces

But, on the other hand, we have great graces and advantages

to expect. If we observe the conditions, that God whom we have so grossly offended will, so to speak, renounce all His rights, and give them up for our sake; for He has an undoubted right to condemn to hell forever the sinner who is His sworn enemy and who has rebelled against His authority; but that right He is willing to give up once for all, and after having forgiven the guilt of sin, to remit all eternal punishment. The sinner has forfeited forever his right to a heavenly inheritance; this right God is ready to restore to him and, forgetting all his offences, to look on him as His beloved child. The sinner, after having repented of and confessed his sins, and received absolution from the priest, still owes a debt of full atonement and satisfaction to the divine justice; that is, he must suffer some temporal punishment, either in this life or in purgatory, until he has paid back the last farthing. This debt is completely remitted; the Catholic Church opens the treasury of the infinite merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, and grants him full remission of all the temporal punishment he has incurred for sin during his whole life, even if his sins surpassed in number the sands on the seashore. Sinner, what more do you want? Are you, perhaps, afraid to confess your sins to your ordinary confessor, or to a priest to whom you otherwise owe obedience as your superior? Do you wish to choose another confessor? Do so then, if you wish; whether you are a layman or a religious, according to the terms of the Bull you are free to choose any confessor you please; for every approved priest has now full power to give you absolution. Are you suspended or excommunicated on account of certain sins? Every approved priest can now, as far as your conscience is concerned, absolve you. Have you committed the most grievous sins that can be committed; even those of which the Holy Father has reserved the absolution to himself? Every approved priest has now full power to absolve you from them. Have you bound yourself by vow to do something for God which you now would wish to have changed into some other work, on account of the difficulty of doing it? If so, now is your time; for every approved priest has now the faculty of commuting vows (except the vows of perpetual chastity and of entering religion). O God of goodness! what great advantages those are, and how they should move us poor sinful mortals to make peace with Thee, that we may escape hell, and at the same time be freed from the grievous temporal punishments that now inflict Christendom!

we may
gain.

Which will
be granted
at once.

And when wilt Thou bestow all those favors on us? When will that desirable peace be ratified and produce its full effect? Not without reason do I ask this question, my dear brethren. For, when earthly potentates, after having warred against each other for a long time, at last make overtures of peace, and endeavor to bring back tranquillity to the countries subject to their sway, oh, what a long time it takes before everything is definitely arranged! At first couriers are sent with letters from one court to another, and all sorts of proposals are made to see whether the wish for peace is mutual, while a third power must step in to appease the minds of the contending parties. If this much has been effected, the so-called preliminaries of the peace have to be arranged, and accepted by both sides. The next step is to send the couriers back to and fro again, to settle in what town or country the peace-congress is to be held, and where the ambassadors from both sides are to meet. This, of course, requires time, and when it is done, what follows? Is the peace concluded at last? Not by any means! Whole years may elapse before the ambassadors agree; and very often it happens that, while the treaty of peace is actually being considered, war breaks out anew more violently than ever. But when they do come to an agreement, is the matter settled? No, not yet; everything that has been arranged at the congress must first be examined at both courts, and be ratified, approved of, and signed, or else the whole affair will come to nothing. At last, when after a considerable time the conditions are fulfilled, peace is definitely proclaimed. So much trouble is required to reconcile two parties of men who have been fighting with each other. Great God, mighty Monarch of heaven and earth! we poor weak worms of the earth have hitherto waged war on Thee! Now arises the question of making peace with Thee, and Thou, although Thou art the aggrieved One, art the first to offer us such advantageous terms, that, if we have a spark of reason left, we cannot refuse to accept them. And when, I ask again, is this peace to be fully ratified? In a year? or six months? or in forty, thirty, or twenty days? No, Christians, it does not take so long. This very day, the moment we make up our minds to fulfil the conditions, and present ourselves with contrite hearts before the God whom we have offended, the whole matter is concluded; peace is confirmed, and we have sure possession of all the graces offered us, nor is there the least danger that God will ever declare war on us again, unless we are the first to

commence hostilities. O my God! how great is Thy goodness and mercy to us unworthy mortals!

Now I say again, if, in the face of all this, there should be one Christian in the world so selfish, so boorish, and so hardened in wickedness, as to refuse to make that advantageous and, under the present circumstances, necessary peace, and to neglect to reconcile himself to God, thinking, as all impenitent sinners do, and saying, if not in word, at least in act, I will do as I like; what is it to me whether there is war or peace in the world? What do I care whether men laugh or cry? Let them look to it who feel the pinch of want; for my part, let things go as they will in the world; I did not ask the Pope for his jubilee, nor do I wish to make peace with God, nor, as far as I am concerned, to try to appease His anger against the world, or to avert the calamities that oppress it; I can easily say a few prayers, visit the churches, fast, and give a few pence to the poor, nor is there any difficulty in telling my sins to some simple-minded priest in confession; it is now Easter time; I must do these things in any case to avoid getting a bad name among the people, but I have no intention of really amending my life or repenting of my sins from my heart; I will remain as I am. For shame! I say; such a Christian would be a monster! and if, as I do not believe, any such a one were here present, I would say to him: beware of what you do and say! I do not wish you any evil, but rather desire from my heart that you would really repent of your sins, so that things might go well with you here, as well as hereafter; but I cannot help thinking that, if many suffering mortals in the world knew who you are, they would treat you as the inhabitants of a town would treat the worthless citizen who, instead of helping to extinguish a conflagration, stands idly by, laughing at the damage done his neighbor's property. I am afraid that, at all events, they would heap imprecations on your head, and say, in the words of Sophar, a friend of Job: "May his belly be filled, that God may send forth the wrath of His indignation upon him, and rain down His war upon him: his bread in his belly shall be turned into the gall of asps within him." They would call down upon you all those curses which the Prophet David, according to the commentators, uttered against the traitor Judas in the one hundred and eighth psalm: "May his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow: let his children be carried

How unworthy for one to refuse to make peace under such circumstances!

¹ *Utnam impleatur venter ejus, ut emittat in eum iram furoris sui. et pluat super illum bellum suum: panis ejus in utero illius vertetur in fel aspidum intrinsecus.*—Job xx. 23, 14.

Conclusion
and resolu-
tion to
make peace
with God at
once.

about vagabonds, and beg; let them be cast out of their dwellings. May the usurer search all his substance; and let strangers plunder his labors;"¹ since he refused to help in obtaining for the world the blessings of peace.

Far be it from us, my dear brethren, to give occasion to such a terrible imprecation. Sinners, "for Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God!" We beg and implore of you again, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ; we beg and implore of you for the sake of so many countries in Europe, make peace now with God! Let us all, without exception, agree to procure that peace which is so advantageous, so desirable, and so much longed for by nearly the whole world, and let us say: O God of infinite goodness, I will hesitate no longer; I must not and will not be the only one amongst so many to disturb the joy of this festival, and obstinately to oppose that most important object which the whole Christian world is now striving for so earnestly. Joyfully do I sign the contract and accept the conditions that Thou graciously proposest. Readily do I undertake to fulfil them all, to be reconciled to Thee from my whole heart, and from this moment, after having duly repented of and confessed my sins, and thus made peace with Thee, to begin a new life. Thus, O God, we hope that, being appeased by our conversion, Thou wilt show that Thou art still what Thou wert to Judith in the besieged town of Bethulia. "Thou art our God, who destroyest wars from the beginning, and the Lord is Thy name."² Thou art He who canst unite the hearts of potentates, and give to us all that peace which the whole world cannot give, so that we may serve Thee constantly in future with peace and contentment of heart. Amen.

For the Last Day of this Jubilee, see the Forty-ninth Sermon of this Part.

¹ Plaut filii ejus orphani, et uxor ejus vidua: nutantes transferantur filii ejus, et mendicent, et ejiciantur de habitationibus suis. Scrutetur foenerator omnem substantiam ejus et diripiant alieni labores ejus.—Ps. cviii. 9-11.

² Tu ipse es Deus noster, qui conteris bella ab initio, et Dominus nomen est tibi.—Juditha ix. 10.

ON PRAYER AND PENANCE IN PUBLIC CALAMITIES AND TRIALS.

SIXTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE EFFICACY OF THE PRAYERS OF THE JUST.

Subject.

The most powerful means of obtaining everything from God is the prayer of the just; therefore we can now be certain that we shall get what we ask for, if we are in the state of grace.—
Preached on the occasion of public prayers for fertility.

Text.

Si cor nostrum non reprehenderit nos, fiduciam habemus ad Deum, et quidquid petierimus, accipiemus ab eo.—I. John iii. 21, 22.

“If our heart do not reprehend us, we have confidence towards God: and whatsoever we shall ask, we shall receive of Him.”

Introduction.

Is this to be a thanksgiving feast or a day of prayer? According to my idea, my dear brethren, there is ample reason for both; for, in the first place, we must return thanks to God for all the special blessings He has bestowed on our city and country during this year; and in the second place, we must endeavor by fervent and humble prayer to obtain from the same most generous God a continuation of His favors. We have reason enough for gratitude when we consider the times we have just passed through, for, while many of the neighboring as well as the more remote states and kingdoms have felt all the evils of war, and have been plundered, devastated, laid waste, and drained of all their resources, we, who otherwise are generally the first to feel

the pressure of such calamities, have been by some special decree of Providence wonderfully preserved from all disaster. And then, how threatening the weather looked during the whole spring, up to the month of June! It seemed as if there were to be no summer, so that many despaired of getting any crop from their fields or vineyards. And yet in a short time, by the blessing of God, both harvests turned out very well, nay, they were even abundant. In many other countries the farmers were bitterly disappointed, for the young crops were trampled down by marauding soldiers, or were eaten by the field-mice, or destroyed by hailstorms. Our archdiocese of Treves has suffered little or nothing from any of these plagues. O God of goodness, we owe Thee, then, a debt of special gratitude, and we must unceasingly praise and bless Thy holy name for having shown us such great mercy! Most generous God, we have still another favor to implore of Thee, and that is, that Thou wouldst deign with fatherly goodness to bestow Thy blessing and favorable weather on us, that the abundant fruits of the earth, which the heavy rains have hitherto kept on the ground, may be safely gathered into the barns, and that our vines, laden with fruit, may come to maturity. Such is the end of the prayers we have been ordered to say to-day, that our unanimous supplications may obtain these favors from Thee! And it is but right and just that we should humbly acknowledge that Thou alone art the Lord, who, as Thou hast clearly shown us, canst easily either give or withhold those blessings, and art the only One in whom our hopes must rest; and that all the more, because, on the one hand, Thou wilt not give Thy favors to those who do not ask for them; and on the other hand, Thou hast promised to grant everything to the confident prayer of Thy faithful servants, according to the assurance that Thou givest us by Thy beloved disciple: "If our heart do not reprehend us, we have confidence towards God; and whatsoever we shall ask, we shall receive of Him." Let us, then, my dear brethren, pray with confidence, and with assured hopes await abundant blessings from God. The reasons for that hope I shall now proceed to show you.

Plan of Discourse.

The most powerful means of obtaining everything from God is the prayer of the just; therefore we can now be certain that we shall get what we ask for, if we are in the state of grace, and persevere in prayer. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

Most generous God, grant that efficacy to our prayers; we ask this of Thee through the merits of Mary and of our holy guardian angels, that the words may be verified in us, "If our heart do not reprehend us, etc."

Many creatures in the world have the name of being strong and powerful; thus kings and other potentates are called, "most puissant," "most mighty," because they maintain great armies, by which they can defend themselves against the attacks of their enemies, and overthrow the strongest bulwarks, while all their subjects must obey their least sign and at once do what they command. Amongst unreasoning animals, the lion has the name of being strong and powerful, because his strength surpasses that of all the other animals, and his very roar is sufficient to fill them with terror. Amongst the elements, water, wind, and fire have the name of being strong; the first, because, when it once gains the upper hand, there is no resisting it; the second, because its impetuosity can uproot the strongest trees, and prostrate them on the ground; the third, because it can in a short time lay waste whole cities. Amongst drinks, wine has the name of being strong, because it has the power of intoxicating and depriving of their senses all who take too much of it, whether they be young or old, strong or weak. Physical beauty has the name of being strong, because it wins the hearts of the mightiest kings and most valiant warriors, and, as it were, bewitches them.

Many things on earth have great power and strength.

But the power of these things does not extend beyond creatures that are weaker than themselves. If, on the other hand, I could point to something outside of God, and say, that has as much power as the almighty God Himself, then, indeed, you should acknowledge that such a thing is the most powerful of all creatures. And that is precisely what I now dare to say, without the least hesitation, but with the greatest reverence towards the supreme God; for the prayer of the just man has a virtue that God cannot withstand. Hear the impressive words of Tertullian: when we unite in prayer, we assail heaven as it were with an army, we overcome the Almighty, snatch from His hands the weapons He had taken up against us, restrain and appease His anger, and compel Him by violence to give us what we desire. "But this violence is pleasing to God."¹ He wishes to be overcome by us in that way; just as a father is pleased if some one takes out of his hand the rod with which he is about to chastise

The prayer of the just man is the most powerful of all, because it overcomes God Himself.

¹ Sed hæc vis Deo grata est.

his beloved son for some fault. Nor are the words of St. Bernard less emphatic; for he does not hesitate to say that the prayers of the just are even more powerful than the invincible God Himself; for they can restrain and overpower Him whose might nothing else can withstand, and they can conquer Him who is invincible.

Proved from
Scripture.

But why should I seek for testimonies from the holy Fathers to prove the truth of my words? Has not God Himself told us plainly enough what violence is offered Him by the prayer of His pious servants? Do you wish for a proof of it? Read the thirty-second chapter of the book of Exodus. In former times God was full of wrath against the Israelites, and He had just cause, too, for His anger; for that ungrateful people, in spite of the extraordinary proofs of the divine favor they had received; in spite of having been freed by the strong arm of God and by the most surprising miracles from the slavery of Egypt; brought through the stormy sea without even wetting their feet, protected by a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night; in spite of the miracle by which water was made to issue from the hard rock to quench their thirst, and of the divine generosity in feeding them so abundantly with heavenly bread in the desert; in spite of all that (who can think of it without indignation?), they go and make a golden calf, and dance and sing around it, adoring it as their god. "And they said: These are thy gods, O Israel, that have brought thee out of the land of Egypt: and rising in the morning they offered holocausts and peace victims, and the people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play."¹ Therefore the Lord was determined to destroy these monsters of ingratitude and to blot them out from the face of the earth; He had already drawn the sword of vengeance, and was about to smite them pitilessly. Strike, O Lord! Why dost Thou wait? Ah, He cannot! And why? Moses is there to prevent Him; he it is who takes the sword and the rod out of His hand. Hear how God has to argue and reason, and, as it were, to contend with Moses in order to get rid of him. "Let Me alone," He says imploringly, "that My wrath may be kindled against them, and that I may destroy them:" do not prevent Me any longer from giving vent to My just anger: I cannot bear any more with their obstinacy and

¹ Dixeruntque: hi sunt dii tui Israel, qui te eduxerunt de terra Egypti: surgentesque mane, obtulerunt holocausta et hostias pacificas, et sedit populus manducare et bibere, et surrexerunt ludere.—Exod. xxxii. 4, 6.

perversity; "let Me alone, and I will make of thee a great nation."¹ Is it not, my dear brethren, as if one were holding back an angry man, who is about to take satisfaction on his enemy, and who, unable to restrain his wrath, cries out to the person holding him: "let me go! I will not be held back"? And what was the end of the contest? Which had to give way? Moses, without doubt? No, quite the contrary: "And the Lord was appeased from doing the evil which He had spoken against His people."² The same kind of contest was carried on between God and the Prophet Jeremias, after the Jews had committed all sorts of crimes, on account of which God was about to reject and cast them off: "I will cast you away from before My face,"³ was the message He sent them. But before inflicting the threatened punishment, He had, so to speak, to get His servant Jeremias on His side, lest he should prevent Him from carrying His threat into execution. "Therefore," said He, as if He were asking a favor, "do not thou pray for this people, nor take to thee praise and supplication for them, and do not withstand Me,"⁴ that I may give vent to My anger, carry out My purpose, and punish that wicked people.

But O Lord, great God! who are Moses and Jeremias, that they dare or can resist Thy almighty will? Can such poor servants venture to contradict the Monarch of heaven and earth? Can such weak mortals restrain Thy all-powerful arm? Can they compel Thee to entreat their permission before Thou art free to do Thy will? What a wonderful and incomprehensible thing! With one word Thou hast created the whole universe, heaven and earth; with a single sign Thou hast called them forth out of nothing; and now Thou art not able to resist one man! No, my dear brethren; He cannot. It was neither Moses nor Jeremias who held Him back and restrained His anger; but their fervent, earnest prayer was the rope with which they tied the hands of the Almighty and snatched the scourge out of them. "But Moses besought the Lord his God, saying: Why, O Lord, is Thy indignation enkindled against Thy people, whom Thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt, with great power, and

This power
comes from
the divine
promise.

¹ *Dimitte me, ut irascatur furor meus contra eos, et deleam eos; faciamque te in gentem magnam.*—Exod. xxxiii. 10.

² *Pacatusque est Dominus ne faceret malum quod locutus fuerat adversus populum suum.*—Ibid. 14.

³ *Projiciam vos a facie mea.*—Jerem. vii. 15.

⁴ *Tu ergo noli orare pro populo hoc, nec assumes pro eis laudem et orationem, et non obistas mihi.*—Ibid. 16.

with a mighty hand?"¹ What would the Egyptians think and say if they heard that? They would say that Thou hast brought out the people to slay them in the mountains and to destroy them off the face of the earth; and what a shame that would be for Thee! Therefore, dear Lord, pardon them this once! "Let Thy anger cease, and be appeased upon the wickedness of Thy people."² This prayer, I say, was what God could not withstand: "And the Lord was appeased from doing the evil." Fearing afterwards a similar opposition on the part of Jeremias, He wished to forestall it, and therefore He implored of the Prophet not to pray for the people, or to withstand Him. O prayer of a pious man! how great is thy power, since thou canst resist the almighty God, even when He is filled with anger, and canst prevent Him from doing what He would willingly do, and compel Him to do what He, as it were, does not wish to do! Whence hast thou that power? From the same God, my dear brethren; for He has pledged Himself, and His own word, solemnly undertaking to grant us all we ask for in a proper manner. Ask, He says to all without exception, ask and you shall receive. If you want anything, all you have to do is to ask for it.

Nearly every wonderful event is an effect of prayer.

Moses and Jeremias are not the only ones who have discovered the power of prayer; for nearly every wonderful thing that has happened in the world is the result of the prayers of the servants of God. If Elias was carried up alive into heaven without tasting death, and if he can there rejoice with God and the angels, he may ascribe that great happiness of his, as St. Peter Chrysologus says, to his fervent and confident prayer: "By prayer Elias escaped death, entered heaven, and now lives with God and the angels."³ If the flames of the Babylonian furnace were changed into a cooling breeze, and the burning coals to blooming roses, so that the only effect of the fire on the three Hebrew youths was to loosen the fetters that bound them, that was due to the fact that their sole occupation while in the furnace was praying and praising God: "Then these three as with one mouth praised, and glorified, and blessed God in the furnace, saying: Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God of our fathers; and worthy to be

¹ *Moyses autem orabat Dominum Deum suum, dicens: eur, Domine, irascitur furor tuus contra populum tuum, quem eduxisti de terra Egypti in fortitudine magna, et in manu robusta?—Exod. xxxii. 11.*

² *Quiescat ira tua, et esto placabilis super nequitia populi tui.—Ibid. 12.*

³ *Per orationem Elias nescit mortem, cœlos intrat, convivit Deo et angelis.*

praised, and glorified, and exalted above all forever.”¹ If the fierce and hungry lions respected Daniel when he was thrown to them in the den, left him unharmed, and fawned at his feet like lambs, that happened because Daniel prayed to God while in the den, as if he were in a temple. If Judith, a weak woman, put the whole Assyrian army to flight by cutting off the head of its general Holofernes, it was prayer alone that enabled her to perform such an exploit. “Judith went into her oratory,” says the Scripture of her, before she went out of the city of Bethulia, “and putting on hair-cloth, laid ashes on her head, and falling down prostrate before the Lord, she cried to the Lord.”² And when she was about to cut off the head of the sleeping Holofernes, “Judith stood before the bed, praying with tears, and the motion of her lips in silence, saying: strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, and in this hour look on the works of my hands, that, as Thou hast promised, Thou mayest raise up Jerusalem, Thy city; and that I may bring to pass that which I have purposed, having a belief that it might be done by Thee.”³ That the same Judith, in spite of her extraordinary beauty, was able to preserve her purity untarnished in the midst of a hostile camp, and especially in the company of the lustful Holofernes, who was quite captivated by her, was also an effect of her humble prayer. “A most wonderful thing,” says St. Augustine; “prayer was able to preserve the chastity of a woman, while the multitude of his soldiers could not save the life of her enemy.”⁴ In a word, the prayers of the just are the cause of all those wonders that astonish the world. If the sky at one time seemed to be made of iron, so that the land was almost burnt up by the drought, the prayers of the just forced the fertilizing rain to fall from it. If the clouds seemed about to empty themselves on the earth, so as to inundate it, the prayers of the just prevented them from letting fall another drop. Prayer protected the people of God when they were besieged, and put their enemies to flight; prayer hardened the waters under the feet of the former, while it caused the earth to open and swallow up the latter. And finally, prayer

Tunc hi tres quasi ex uno ore laudabant, et glorificabant, et benedicebant Deum in fornace, dicentes: benedictus es, Domine, Deus patrum nostrorum, et laudabilis, et gloriosus, et superexaltatus in sæcula.—Dan. iii. 51, 52.

² Judith ingressa est oratorium suum, et induens se cilicio, posuit cinerem super caput suum, et prosternens se Domino, clamabat ad Dominum.—Judith ix. 1.

³ Stetitque Judith ante lectum, orans cum lachrymis et labiorum motu in silentio, dicens: confirma me Domine Deus Israel, et respice in hac hora ad opera manuum mearum; ut, sicut promisisti, Jerusalem civitatem tuam erigas. et hoc quod credens per te posse fieri cogitavi. perficiam.—Ibid. xlii. 6, 7.

⁴ Feminae castitatem servavit oratio, et hostem non potuit servare multitudo.

has proved that the almighty God can resist it as little as a creature can resist His almighty power.

Prayer is
still more
powerful in
the New
Law.

Now, if it has had such wonderful efficacy in the Old Law, what can it not do now that Jesus Christ has sanctified it by His example, increased its merit and value by the infinite merits of His own precious Blood, and united His prayer to ours? Now that in and by His name we can call on God as our heavenly Father, whose adopted children we are, and can implore Him by His own Son, who is God, like unto Himself, to grant our petitions? Oh, certainly, now is the desirable time, when, as St. Augustine says, all the gates of heaven are opened to prayer: "The prayer of the just man is the key of heaven; prayer ascends, and the mercy of God comes down upon us."¹ If we could see the hidden decrees of the Almighty, what wonderful effects should we not have to attribute in our own days to the confident prayer of just and pious souls! We should see how the divine anger was appeased, and public calamities averted from a whole city or country; while a whole community enjoys peace and prosperity, owing to the prayers of one or another pious Christian. Sometimes we look on a man as a simple-minded person, because he is not like others in his mode of life, and because he goes often to the sacraments with proper devotion. You look down on that young girl, perhaps, because she is always dressed according to the rules of Christian humility, and keeps modestly at home. That poor servant-maid, who, in spite of the hard work she has every day, kneels down to say her prayers morning and evening so devoutly, and hears Mass daily, is not worth anything, perhaps, in your opinion; but you must know that that simple-minded man, that modest young girl, that poor servant-maid are those who by their prayers avert the punishments that would otherwise fall on a whole city; that it is to their prayers that you owe it that your house is not fallen to ruins, as a just chastisement for your sins; that it is through their prayers that God bestows such copious blessings on your whole family. For, did not God in former times promise to spare Sodom, if even ten just souls could be found in it? O prayer of the just, I must again exclaim, what a wonderful efficacy thou hast!

What a
happiness
for us, if we
are in the
friendship
of God.

I have to retract, my dear brethren, what I have often said about human weakness and frailty. For we are not in reality so poor and miserable as we seem to be, since we have permission to pray, and have such an inexhaustible treasure at our free dis-

¹ Oratio justī est clavis cœli; ascendit precatio, et descendit Dei miseratio.

posal. Of ourselves we are and can do nothing, that is true; we are all of us, rich and poor, no better than beggars, who have to seek our daily bread at the door of our heavenly Father; that is true also. But can you look on him as really poor and needy who, although he has nothing of his own, yet can procure from another as much as he wants? Can it be said with truth that he is in want who has nothing to do but to ask for all he requires for soul and body, with the assurance that he will get what he asks for? Now, that is the way it is with us; that is the happy position in which God has placed us. We are weak and frail in soul and body; everywhere we are surrounded by a thousand dangers, temptations, and hidden snares, laid for us by our sworn enemies; but let us be comforted and of good heart; we have at hand the surest means of easily obtaining help in all our necessities, if we are only in the grace of God. For all we have to do is to open our mouths, raise our hearts on high, and declare to our heavenly Father what our wants are, and ask from Him all we stand in need of. "We have confidence towards God, and whatsoever we shall ask, we shall receive of Him."

Finally, my dear brethren, if the prayer of one just man has such marvellous power and efficacy, what may we not expect to receive from God, if, while our consciences do not reproach us with any grievous sin, we send up, as we now are doing, our united petitions to His throne? Oh, well may I say with the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas of Aquin: "It is impossible for the united prayers of many to fail in obtaining whatever may be obtained."¹ For clear and truthful is the promise made by Jesus Christ in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "I say to you, that if two of you shall consent upon earth concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by My Father who is in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them."² Now, if the united prayers of two or three are so agreeable to God that He assures them that he will give them whatever they ask for, what a pleasing sight must it not be before God, and what great results may not be expected, when the majority of the faithful of a whole city go together from one church to the other, and send up their united prayers and hymns to heaven! The prayer of one man is like a cannon-ball directed against the walls of the

The united prayers of many are the most powerful of all.

¹ Multorum preces impossibile est quod non impetrent illud quod est impetrabile.

² Dico vobis, quia si duo ex vobis consenserint super terram, de omni re quaecunque petierint, fiet illis a Patre meo, qui in cœlis est. Ubi enim sunt duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum in medio eorum.—Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

town, in order to make a breach in them gradually ; but when many pray together, it is as if they attacked and took heaven by storm. Such is the meaning of the words of Tertullian : “ We assemble together like an army to force our way to God by our prayers and to compel Him to hear our requests.”¹

If offered
with a pure
heart; other-
wise it is of
no good.

But mark, my dear brethren, the condition laid down by St. John : “ if our heart do not reprehend us,” that is, if we are not conscious of a mortal sin, then we can obtain anything from God by prayer. To pray to God and at the same time to be at enmity with Him is not the prayer of the just man, which alone is efficacious. To pray to God for fair weather and fertility, and that He may keep off heavy rains and injurious storms, and yet not to amend one’s sinful life, is like emptying the water out of a cellar without stopping the hole through which it leaks down. To pray to God for a fruitful harvest and vineyards, and yet not to amend sinful ways that are hateful to God, is like expecting to reap good corn off a field in which one has sown nothing but thorns and thistles. To pray to God for a healthy atmosphere, and yet not to avoid sin, is like taking medicine and poison together in sickness. To pray to God that He may avert the evils of war, and still to continue offending Him, is like trying to extinguish a fire by pouring oil on it. In a word, there is no use in trying to get rid of an evil unless you eradicate the cause and root of the evil. Well did the blind man who was cured say, as we read in the Gospel of St. John : “ Now we know that God doth not hear sinners ; but if a man be a servant of God, and doth His will, him He heareth.”² It is sin alone that can prevent prayer from being efficacious and powerful.

As the Is-
raelites ex-
perienced.

When did the Israelites, the chosen people of God, find in Him a severe Master, who punished them in the most terrible manner ? Was it not always when they sinned against His law, and refused to amend or be converted ? Consider them in the cruel slavery of Egypt, under the tyrant Pharaoh ; they sigh and moan, and cry out to God to help them in their misery : “ The children of Israel, groaning, cried out because of the works ; and their cry went up unto God from the works.”³ Did God then hear them ? Yes, says the Scripture : “ And He heard their

¹ Coimus in coetum, ut ad Deum, quasi manu facta precationibus ambiamus.

² Scimus autem quia peccatores Deus non audit; sed si quis Dei cultor est, et voluntatem ejus facit, hunc exaudit.—John ix. 31.

³ Ingemiscientes filii Israel, propter opera vociferati sunt; ascenditque clamor eorum ad Deum ab operibus.—Exod. ii. 23.

groaning, and remembered the covenant which He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And the Lord looked upon the children of Israel, and He knew them.”¹ Soon after He led them out of Egypt by His servant Moses. But I ask, why were the Israelites not heard before? They had been, as Abulensis remarks, already ninety years in bondage, and there is no doubt that they often cried to God for release during that time. True, answers Abulensis; they had been already grievously oppressed, and had cried to heaven for relief; but they were at the time infected with the idolatry and impurity of the Egyptians, as the Prophet Ezechiel writes: “They committed fornication in Egypt, in their youth they committed fornication.”² Therefore, their prayers and cries were ineffectual; God rejected them and their prayers, too. Now, too, they pray and cry in their tribulation, but with sorrow of heart for their sins: “the children of Israel, groaning, cried out.” and therefore God at last took pity on them: “And the Lord looked upon the children of Israel, and He knew them.” O ye prayers of Christians, of what kind are ye? Are ye mere sounds, while the idols are still adored at heart, and creatures are more loved than the Creator? Are ye uttered by those who are still addicted to shameful impurity? or by those who have not yet done true penance, nor amended their sinful lives? If so, then it is no wonder that such prayers remain without fruit, and are not heard by God.

The same people once held a grand procession, and brought the Ark of the Covenant with great solemnity into the camp, in order to make sure of gaining a victory over their enemies. The ark, my dear brethren, was a precious treasure to the Hebrews; it contained three things which represented three divine attributes, for their profit and advantage. It contained the tables of the law, which signified the sovereign dominion of God over all things, that He was pleased to make use of for the protection of His people; the miraculous rod of Aaron, which showed forth the invincible power of God, in which His people would find a sure refuge against their enemies; and, finally, a vessel filled with the manna with which their fathers had been fed in the desert; this manna signified the loving care that divine Providence took of His chosen people, always arranging everything for their greater good. God Himself worked most

When, in spite of their prayers, they were punished still more severely.

¹ Et audivit gemitum eorum, ac recordatus est fœderis quod pepigit cum Abraham, Isaac et Jacob. Et respexit Dominus filios Israel et cognovit eos.—Exod. ii. 24, 25.

² Fornicatæ sunt in Ægypto, in adolescentia sua fornicatæ sunt.—Ezech. xxiii. 8.

surprising miracles in the presence of the ark, and always commanded it to be held in the greatest respect and reverence. When it was carried round the walls of Jericho, the walls fell down at once, without any violence being used; when it was brought to the Jordan, then swollen, the waters divided of their own accord, the upper side part remaining immovable like a wall, while the lower waters flowed off rapidly, thus leaving a dry passage for the ark. It was in this miraculous ark that the Israelites placed their last hopes, after having lost four thousand men in an engagement with the Philistines, and dreading with good reason that they might be equally unfortunate another time: "And the ancients of Israel said: "Why hath the Lord defeated us to-day before the Philistines?"' We must prevent a recurrence of that disaster. Quick! "let us fetch unto us the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord from Silo, and let it come into the midst of us, that it may save us from the hand of our enemies. And when the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord was come into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, and the earth rang again." They were fully persuaded that in the presence of the ark they would have nothing to fear from their enemies; and in fact, when the Philistines heard of its arrival, they were greatly disconcerted, and cried out: "God is come into the camp. And sighing they said: Woe to us. Who shall deliver us from the hand of these high gods?" Soon after another battle took place, and which side gained the victory? "Israel was overthrown, and every man fled to his own dwelling; and there was an exceeding great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen; and the ark of God was taken." Such was the result of the battle. But how was that? Did God no longer value the ark He formerly held so sacred? It was just as sacred as ever in His eyes. Perhaps He did not wish so much honor to be shown to the ark any longer? No, He desired it to be held in great esteem, as it formerly was, and proved that desire to the great loss of the Philistines. If so, then what was the cause of such a shameful defeat in the very

¹ Dixeruntque majores natu de Israel: quare percussit nos Dominus hodie coram Philistin?—I. Kings iv. 3.

² Afferamus ad nos de Silo arcam fœderis Domini, et veniat in medium nostri, ut salvet nos de manu inimicorum nostrorum. Cumque venisset arca fœderis Domini in castra, vociferatus est omnis Israel clamore grandi, et personuit terra.—Ibid. 3, 5.

³ Venit Deus in castra; et ingemuerunt, dicentes: vae nobis! Quis nos salvabit de manuum sublimium istorum?—Ibid. 7, 8.

⁴ Cæsus est Israel, et fugit unusquisque in tabernaculum suum: et facta est plaga magna nimis; et ceciderunt de Israel triginta millia peditum; et arca Dei capta est.—Ibid. 10, 11.

presence of the ark, which was given to the Hebrews as a sign of the divine help and protection? It was, as Theodoret says, out of respect for the ark that God refused to protect the people who had grievously offended Him, and would not do penance. They showed outward honor to the ark, but with sin on their souls; they greeted it with loud cries, but without shedding a single tear of penance or heaving one penitent sigh; and therefore it was of no help to them. What wonder is it, asks Denis the Carthusian, that calamities and trials increase instead of diminishing amongst Christians, in spite of public prayers and pilgrimages, when they who take part in them are in the state of mortal sin? The Israelites, he continues, who brought the ark into camp, represent those Christians who in times of calamities carry in procession the Blessed Sacrament, or the statues and relics of the saints, filling the air with their cries to heaven for mercy, while they make not the least effort to amend their sinful lives; along with the picture of Mary, they have in their minds a hideous image of Venus, while they carry the devil about in their hearts with the pictures of the angels and saints; so that all their prayers and processions are of no use to them, and they are often punished even more grievously than before. Such, too, is the opinion of St. Augustine. "The punishment increases daily," he says, "because sins increase."

Do we wish, then, my dear brethren, that God should grant our requests? then let us first do as He wishes. "We must first weep and then pray,"¹ is the warning given us by St. Ambrose. We must have sorrow for our sins, and truly repent and amend our lives, if we wish our prayers and devotions to be pleasing to God, and to have the desired effect. Therefore, sinners, be converted to God, be reconciled to your neighbor, restore those ill-gotten goods, cast away the stone of scandal, leave that improper company and impure intimacy, give up that monstrous habit of cursing and swearing, do penance for your sins, which are the only occasion of the evils that afflict you, and if you are firmly resolved to do that, then come and pray with the just, and say to God, "that Thou wouldst vouchsafe to give and preserve the fruits of the earth, we beseech Thee to hear us."² Grant, O Lord, that our fields and vineyards may bear abundant fruit! Already Thou hast blessed our fields far beyond our

Therefore
sinners
should do
penance and
help the
just to pray
for fine
weather.

¹ Crescit quotidie poena, quia quotidie crescit et culpa.

² Ante fiendum est, et sic precandum.

³ Ut fructus terræ dare et conservare digneris, te rogamus, audi nos.

expectations, and we thank Thee therefore with all our hearts, while Thou hast given us far better hopes with regard to our vineyards than we dared to entertain, considering the nature of the seasons we have had. Most generous God, complete Thy goodness to us by preserving what Thou hast given, that we may harvest our crops safely.

And yet
leave the
weather to
the disposi-
tion of
Providence.
shown by a
fable.

With regard to the weather, whether it is to be hot or cold, dry or rainy, we leave that to Thy all-wise Providence: for very often we do not know what we wish or desire, nor what we are complaining about, and Thou mightest with reason address to us the same reproof Thou gavest to the sons of Zebedee: "You know not what you ask."¹ We are like the man in the fable. (Hear this, ye of little faith, who, as soon as the least appearance of what you think unfavorable weather sets in, commence to complain and to despair of your crops, thus very often compelling the good God to withdraw His blessing from us, in punishment of your complaints.) Driven by want, a man was about to sell his property, but could not find a purchaser to give him the price he thought fair; he therefore humbly besought the god Jupiter to change men's minds and make them disposed to agree to his terms. I will do so, answered Jupiter; go and tell every one that whosoever buys your property will have whatever weather he likes, at all times. When this was made known, there was great competition as to who should make the purchase, for every one thought that it would be an excellent thing to have the weather so completely under control. He who offered the highest price and became the fortunate possessor of the land began at once to study as to how he could best use his privilege, so as to be sure of having good crops in every part of his fields; sometimes he wished for rain, sometimes for dry weather, and whatever he wished for in that way he had. But when the time for the harvest arrived, and he thought he was sure of being made rich, he had nothing to bring into his barns, for, all the seeds that had shot up from the earth produced nothing but straw and stalks without any fruit. What is the meaning of this, he said to himself. I must have made a mistake in selecting the weather. Next spring he began to wish again, but he changed the order he had followed the year before; where he wished for rain or cool weather then, he now asked for sunshine and heat. But the poor man was again disappointed; his crops came to nothing, although he thought he had managed matters very well.

¹ Nescitis quid petatis. —Matt xx. 22.

At last he lost all confidence in his powers of weather-making, and falling at the feet of Jupiter, he cried out: see, I will wish no more, for it is clear that I do not understand the business; forgive me for having usurped your office; in future I will let the weather be what it will; do you arrange it according to your good pleasure, and not as I might wish, and whatever you do, I will be satisfied. This pleased Jupiter exceedingly; good, said he; now you are acting prudently in allowing me to do as I like; your wishes were not well directed before, but go now, and receive with gratitude what I shall give you. After that, no matter what the weather was, the man always had a good harvest, as a general rule, and he left us all by way of warning the old saying, "let the gods alone." So it is, O only true and living God, and Ruler of all things! Such are our sentiments. We do not desire to have weather to suit our fancies, for we humbly acknowledge that we do not understand the matter. Thou alone knowest what is good for us; do, then, as Thou pleasest; for it is as easy for Thy almighty power to help us in one way as in another, and, if one crop fails, to make more than sufficient compensation for it by the abundance of another, as we have already had proof of. In any case, we will be content with Thy fatherly Providence.

If our sins, perhaps, prevent Thee from hearing our prayers, behold, we now acknowledge with sorrowful hearts our guilt; we condemn and detest everything that has hitherto been displeasing to Thee in our lives and actions, and we make the firm resolution to keep Thy holy laws inviolably for the future, and to serve Thee with the utmost zeal and fidelity. With contrite hearts, then, we continue to address our prayers to Thee, full of confidence in Thy promise to grant us what we ask; and, if it is for the good of our souls, trusting that Thou wilt fulfil in our regard what Thou saidst to the Wise Man: "Fear God and depart from evil; and thy barn shall be filled with abundance, and thy presses shall run over with wine."¹ O Lord, let it be done according to Thy will! Amen.

Then we
shall be
heard.

¹ Time Deum et recede a malo, et implebuntur horrea tua saturitate, et vino torcularia tua redundabunt.—Prov. iii. 7, 10.

*Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the Feast of St.
James the Apostle.*

Text.

Nescitis quid petatis.—Matt. xx. 22.

“You know not what you ask.”

Introduction.

Truly, that mother was ambitious: “Say that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left in Thy kingdom.” She asked for a great deal, indeed, yet her request was not a presumptuous one, when we consider the infinite goodness and liberality of God, who can easily grant all that is asked of Him, and has promised to give what they request to those who pray to Him. And that mother would have obtained her request, if she had not asked unwisely; for, she either imagined the kingdom of Christ to be an earthly one, in which she hoped her two sons would have the highest places; or, else, if she understood the kingdom of Our Lord to be heaven, her request was still unreasonable, for the elect are apportioned a higher or lower degree of glory according to the merits of each one. Therefore her request was rejected by Christ, and the only answer she got was, “you know not what you ask.” My dear brethren, we often complain that we pray so much, and yet receive so little from God, although we have His infallible promise, “If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you.”¹ How does that happen? Ah, could not the same answer be given to us? “You know not what you ask.” And so it is; either we know not what is good for us, when we ask for some temporal blessing, or we do not wish to obtain what we ask, if we sometimes implore a spiritual grace, or (and it is in this that the prayers of most people are prevented from being efficacious), we do not pray in the right state, since our hearts are not pure. If we were always free from these faults, and especially from the last mentioned, oh, what could we not then obtain from the good God! Hear what St. John says: “If our heart do not reprehend us, we have confidence towards God, and whatsoever we ask, we shall receive of Him.” Yes, my dear brethren, if we pray in that way, we can obtain everything from God, as I shall now show.—*Plan of Discourse as above.*

¹ *Si quid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, dabit vobis.*—John xvi. 23.

Another Peroration for the same Feast, to be inserted on page 433, after the Paragraph ending "because sins increase." The remaining Paragraphs of the Sermon to be omitted.

Let us, then, my dear brethren, above all, keep always in the friendship of God, that in all our necessities we may fly to Him for refuge with child-like confidence, assured that He will protect us. O God of goodness, what great happiness we have in our hands daily, and yet we prize it as little as if we had no help to expect from any one in our necessities. We complain of our miseries, and forget that we can easily free ourselves from them, if we only make up our minds to speak to Thee about them. If a courtier were always sure of being admitted to the presence of his sovereign, and of being allowed to present his petitions, how happy he would be, even if he had not the assurance of always obtaining what he might ask for? But how rare a thing is such confidence amongst the great ones of this world! To seek an audience and obtain it are two different things; much less can one always hope to obtain one's request. Thou, O supreme Monarch, dealest with us mortals in a far different manner! In all places, by day or night, whenever we wish, and as long as we wish, we can have an audience of Thee; and not only dost Thou admit us freely into Thy presence, but Thou desirest, entreatest, commandest us even to appear before Thee and present our petitions, because Thou art always ready to hear us, and because Thou willest that we should compel Thee to give us Thy graces. If Thou sometimes dost not bestow on us at once what we desire, it is that we may persevere in prayer, so as to give Thee an opportunity of being still more liberal to us; and if Thou givest us a little, it is that we may turn to Thee again and continue in prayer, while, if Thou refusest the temporal things we ask for, Thy only object is to bestow on us a larger share of eternal goods! For the future, then, in all accidents and wants of body and soul, we shall take refuge in prayer with thankful hearts for the many benefits we have received from Thee; and especially as far as our consciences are concerned, we shall keep in Thy friendship, and thus await with confidence further blessings from Thee, assured that whatsoever we shall ask from Thee we shall receive. Amen.

.SIXTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON THE REAL CAUSES OF PUBLIC CALAMITIES.

Subject.

The sins and vices of the people compel the Lord God to chastise a whole land with public calamities; therefore we must do penance and amend our lives.—*Preached in the year 1730, during a time of public prayer.*

Text.

Tradite illum solum, et recedemus a civitate.—II. Kings xx. 21.
“Deliver him only, and we will depart from the city.”

Introduction.

When Joab, the general of king David, was besieging the town of Abela, and his soldiers had already made a breach in the walls, with the intention of capturing the rebel Seba, who had taken refuge in that town, a certain woman ascended the wall, and cried out at the top of her voice: Joab, what are you doing? “Thou seekest to destroy the city and to overthrow a mother in Israel? Why wilt thou throw down the inheritance of the Lord?”¹ No, answered Joab, that is not my design; “God forbid that I should: the matter is not so, but a man of Mount Ephraim, Seba, the son of Bochri by name, hath lifted up his hand against king David: deliver him only, and we will depart from the city,”² and will not do you any harm; otherwise you must suffer in the general ruin of the city. The woman went at once to the people and told them the reason of their being besieged, whereupon they cut off the head of the rebel and threw it over the wall at the feet of Joab: “And he sounded the trumpet, and they departed from the city, every one to his home.”³ So far the history. When I consider, my dear brethren, the circumstances in which we are at present, this city and land of ours appears to me to be besieged on all sides by calamities and distress, while we, like that woman, full of fear and

¹ Quæris subvertere civitatem, et evertere matrem in Israel? Quare præcipitas hæreditatem Domini?—II. Kings xx. 19.

² Absit, absit hoc a me: non sic se habet res; sed homo de monte Ephraim, Seba, filius Bochri cognomine, levavit manum suam contra regem David: tradite illum solum, et recedemus a civitate.—Ibid. 20, 21.

³ Et ille cecinit tuba, et recesserunt ab urbe, unusquisque in tabernacula sua.—Ibid. 22.

anguish, cry out: what? will you destroy us again? O God of goodness, turn away Thy anger from us! We have suffered enough already! But it seems to me, also, that I hear the same answer that Joab gave, no, that is not what we seek; "Seba hath lifted his hand;" there is a rebellious Seba, there are in fact several Sebas in your town, in your country, who have lifted up their hands against the Lord God; deliver them up; let them surrender to their God by true penance and conversion, and "we will depart from the city," from your land. Otherwise we shall be forced to fall upon all of you without distinction, nor will your prayers of supplication be of any avail. So it is, my dear brethren, as I shall now show, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

The sins and vices of the people compel the Lord God to chastise a whole land with public calamities; therefore, if we wish to be freed from them, we must do penance and amend our lives. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

Mary, refuge of sinners, and help of Christians! Thou art that woman who canst best obtain grace and mercy from Thy Son; obtain for us, then, a powerful grace to cut off the heads of the rebels, that we may slay and destroy all sin and vice by repentance, so that, free from the dread of impending calamity, we may zealously serve thee and thy Son in peace and quiet! Holy angels and guardians of our dear country, help us by your powerful intercession to avert the evils that threaten us.

The foundation of my sermon is supplied by that celebrated saying of St. Bernardine of Siena, "In three ways God wishes to eradicate sin: first, by preachers; secondly, by princes; thirdly, by war, pestilence, and famine." The Almighty acts in this respect like the famous Tamerlane, who on account of his success in war was called the "Terror of the World." Whenever Tamerlane besieged a town, he caused a white flag to be hung up in sight of it for the first three days, as a sign that, if the inhabitants surrendered to him, he would spare their lives. During the following days, if they refused to surrender, he had a red flag hung up, surrounded by soldiers with drawn swords, to show that, when the town was captured, the soldiers and chief men would be put to death in punishment of their obstinacy. Finally,

In three ways God endeavors to banish sin from a country. Shown by a simile.

¹ Tribus modis Deus vult tollere peccata: primum, per prædicatores; secundum, per principes; tertio per bellum, pestem, et famem.—S. Bernardin. Sermon. xlvii., feria v. post Dom. Passionem.

if the inhabitants still held out, he hung up a black flag, as a sign that he meant to destroy the town and put every one, innocent as well as guilty, to the sword, not sparing even the infant in the mother's womb; and this threat of his he always carried into execution.

Firstly, by preachers.

In the same way, it seems to me, God acts towards sinners who are His enemies and rebels against His authority. We have in Him a good, patient, and merciful Lord, who bears with our vices for a long time with amazing patience, and does not draw the sword of vengeance to punish us; and woe to us poor mortals if He dealt otherwise with us, for then the world would have been destroyed a hundred thousand times. Yet, since He hates sin in a special manner, and is compelled to punish and eradicate it, He first sets up the white flag, by way of fatherly warning, amid the sound of trumpets; that is, He sends His preachers into the pulpits, as living trumpets, to make known His will, according to His own words to the Prophet Joel: "Blow the trumpet in Sion, call a solemn assembly, gather together the people:"¹ exhort and reprove them on account of their vices, so that they may do penance, and have the treasury of My graces opened to them again. "Now, therefore, saith the Lord, turn to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil."²

Secondly, by princes.

But if this first means does not help to convert the sinner, then God has recourse to the second, and hangs up the red flag surrounded by drawn swords; that is, He makes use of princes, potentates, and temporal superiors, and obliges them as His plenipotentiaries to wield the sword of justice against the guilty alone, and by their authority to put a stop to abuses and vices among the people.

Thirdly, by war, pestilence, and famine.

Finally, when that too fails, He is forced to show the black flag, that is, to stretch forth His almighty arm and strike a whole city or country, without making any distinction between good and bad, with war and devastation, famine and unfruitful seasons, pestilence and contagious maladies, letting them feel the full weight of His chastising arm.

The world to-day is full of sin and vice.

Ah, since that is the case, my dear brethren, I do not wonder that the world nowadays is oppressed and tormented by so many trials and calamities. It is even surprising that any country re-

¹ Canite tuba in Sion, vocate cœtum, congregare populum.—Joel ii. 15, 16.

² Nunc ergo dicit Dominus: convertimini ad Dominum Deum vestrum, quia benignus et misericors est, patiens et multa misericordiæ, et præstabilis super malitiâ.—Ibid. 12, 13.

mains free from them. For, if you could accompany me in thought through the world, in order to examine how people act in their different states of life, in their different offices and employments, lay and clerical, what a vast amount of sin and vice we should see and hear of? What an almost endless number of sins we should discover, if we could see into the secrets of conscience? Pride amongst the great; evil training amongst the lowly; avarice and injustice amongst the rich; dissolute lives among the poor; shameful adulteries amongst married people; impurity amongst the unmarried; sacrileges and bad example amongst the clergy; drunkenness amongst men; public scandal amongst women; hatred, envy, and vindictiveness amongst friends and enemies; cursing, swearing, fault-finding, detraction, sloth, and idleness in the divine service amongst the greater number; who could count up all those sins? O God of justice and holiness, is it possible that Thou canst behold so patiently so much perversity, and not at once draw the sword of Thy vengeance to punish it?

No; His mercy first makes use of a milder means; and He endeavors to eradicate all those vices by His preachers; but for how many years do they not sound the trumpet in vain? There is no want of preachers in Catholic towns; on all Sundays and holy-days they cry out at the top of their voices, inviting sinners to repent and the just to be more zealous in the divine service; and what do they effect? Generally speaking, nothing; or else so little, that it is not worth while. Those who are most in want of sermons seldom come to hear them, either through sloth, or because they are afraid of being warned of their duty and awakened out of the sleep of their vicious or slothful lives. Amongst those who hear the word of God, how many are there who really profit by it? They can say that they have heard it, and that is all. Otherwise, where are the signs of amendment of their un-Christian lives, of a change for the better, of their doing what they are exhorted to do? We have to wait a long time for them. Nor is there any necessity of going much through the world to see the truth of that. There is hardly one of the vices I have mentioned that has not been preached against several times; how many have, therefore, given up the shameful habit of cursing and swearing? how many have made restitution for injuries inflicted on their neighbor's property or character? how many have given up impurity? how many have laid aside their hatred against their neighbor? how many have begun to practise

Against
which
preachers
are, gener-
ally speak-
ing, power-
less.

sobriety? how many have done away with scandalous abuses? Have we not just reason to complain with our dear Lord, who said, after He had cleansed the ten lepers and but one of them returned to thank Him: "Were not ten made clean, and where are the nine? There is no one found to return and give glory to God, but this stranger"?¹ In the same way we might say: are there not several who were guilty of this or that vice, and who have heard sermons against them? Where, then, are those who were converted? There is no one found to give glory to God in that way; perhaps you might find one here and there; certainly not one in ten, hardly one in fifty; the others remain as they were before, and continue in their old ways. If St. Paul boasts of his Thessalonians, "For you are our glory and joy,"² since you have heard my teaching and acted according to it, many preachers could now say with sorrow of heart: you are our shame and our sorrow, for you shut your ears to our preaching and derive no spiritual profit from it. Behold, O Lord! Thou dost not gain Thy end by the first means! And yet Thou commandest us to continue preaching and exhorting, partly for the good of a few, who have the mark of predestination, and who are of the number of those sheep that hear Thy voice and follow it; and partly to make more evident the justice of Thy condemnation of the wicked, for on the Last Day Thou wilt remind them that there was no want of interpreters of Thy holy will and law; and what causes me the greatest pain is the fact that we, too, shall have to appear as their accusers, and help in the condemnation of those for whose sake and eternal salvation we cheerfully labor and toil; for we shall have to give testimony that we told them what to do, and they would not do it.

As well as
the author-
ity and just
measures
of princes.

Then God goes on to the second means, those princes and temporal superiors, to whom He has given authority over His people on earth, to keep them in the bounds of His law. There is no doubt that they can do much good, and hinder much evil amongst their subjects, if they are really zealous in furthering the honor and glory of God and the salvation of souls; and their preaching is in one respect, as experience teaches, far more powerful than the words of God itself when delivered from the pulpit, for they have the means of enforcing their commands, which preachers have not. God has at all times aroused a zeal

¹ Nonne decem mundati sunt? et novem ubi sunt? non est inventus qui rediret et daret gloriam Deo, nisi hic alienigena?—Luke xvii. 17, 18.

² Vos enim estis gloria nostra et gaudium.—I. Thess. ii. 20.

of this kind in the heart of Christian princes, amongst whom we must not forget our present, gloriously reigning archbishop and prince. The efforts that he has made to further the honor and glory of God, and to banish vice from amongst his subjects, are evident enough in the severe laws against abuses that were almost publicly known, and in the strict inquiries that he has caused to be made regarding them. Praised be God! much good has already been done thereby, and more will yet be done, as far as public vice is concerned. But the power of princes does not extend beyond this; namely, they can deter their subjects by the fear of punishment or disgrace from outward sins, that readily attract notice; but, since they are not lords of the heart and conscience, all their vigilance, and threats, and laws, and punishments cannot eradicate vice. How many sins are not committed in secret, or at least in desire, that cry to heaven for vengeance? And thus God again fails to attain His end.

Therefore, as a last resource, since He cannot allow sin to remain unpunished, He must set up the black flag, and chastise a whole nation with His powerful arm, by war, famine, and pestilence. War, devastation, plague, contagious maladies, sterility, poverty, hunger, terrible storms, inundations, and other instruments of chastisement, which the Divine Justice has in store, where are ye? But no, I do not wish to invite you! To all appearance, my dear brethren, war is not far from our frontier; and you know better than I can tell you, from past sad experience, what its effects are; for they are not yet wiped out, either, as far as morality or temporal prosperity is concerned. And I leave you to imagine how it will be with us if war breaks out again. The unfruitful season, which is so injurious to the crops and vineyards, seems already to be bringing famine in its train for many poor citizens and peasants; how will it be if next year (and indeed many such years are not required to cause a famine) the season should be equally bad? The plague (the very name of it frightens me!) or some epidemic is generally the companion of war and famine, of an unfruitful season and poverty. What are we to do, Christians? If those punishments are not already at our doors, yet we have good reason to dread them, and if we do not prevent Him, an angry God will soon inflict them on us. "I will call in the sword against him in all My mountains, saith the Lord God;"¹ such is the terrible threat we read in the

Therefore
God is forced
to punish
by war,
famine, and
pestilence,
which we
now have to
dread.

¹ Convocabo adversus eum in cunctis montibus meis gladium, ait Dominus Deus. — Ezech. xxxviii. 21.

prophecy of Ezechiel; since nothing else is of any avail, I will have recourse to another, more efficacious means; "And I will judge him with pestilence, and with blood, and with violent rain, and vast hail-stones; I will rain fire and brimstone upon him; And I will be magnified, and I will be sanctified, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am the Lord."

Therefore
we must do
penance for
our sins.

What are we to do? I ask again. Raise up to heaven your hearts, your hands, your humble sighs and tears, and the anger of God must necessarily be appeased, and the impending chastisements averted! Let us cry out with the Catholic Church: "Hear us, O Lord, who cry unto Thee," grant what we most humbly ask for, a fair, healthy, and fruitful season, "so that we, who are justly afflicted for our sins, may by Thy forestalling mercy experience Thy clemency."¹ Such is the prayer offered up by the priests on the altar; such, too, has been the nature of the petitions we all addressed to God during those days of prayer and penance. Persevere, then, in prayer! But after all, what is the good of it? All our efforts are in vain, unless we try to get rid of our sins by true penance and amendment of life. The rebels against God must be given up. To no purpose do we use medicine, as long as the germs of disease remain in us; to no purpose do we pray to be freed from an evil, as long as the cause of the evil is not destroyed. Christ teaches us this truth in the Gospel of St. Matthew. When the man sick of the palsy was brought to Him, He said: "Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee."² The forgiveness of sins! What a great grace that is, O dear Saviour! But it is not the grace that was asked of Thee; Thou wert not requested to pardon his sins, but to heal the bodily infirmity from which he was suffering. True; but because Our Lord intended granting the man's petition, He infused into his heart a powerful inspiration of sorrow and contrition for his sins, without which he could not have any hope of being healed of his sickness. But when his sins were forgiven and his soul healed, then did Christ restore his bodily health: "Then said he to the man sick of the palsy: Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house. And he arose and went into his

¹ Et judicabo eum peste, et sanguine, et imbre vehementi, et lapidibus immensis; ignem et sulphur pluam super eum; et magnificabor et sanctificabor, et notus ero in oculis multarum gentium, et scient quia ego Dominus.—Ezech. xxxviii. 22, 23.

² Ad te nos, Domine, clamantes exaudi, ut qui juste pro peccatis nostris affligimur, misericordia tua præveniente clementiam sentiamus.

³ Confide fili, remittuntur tibi peccata tua.—Matt. ix. 2.

house.”¹ Cardinal Hugo, commenting on this passage, remarks that Our Lord acted like an experienced physician, who first removes the causes of the illness, and then cures the illness itself.”²

The sins and vices of the people are the only causes of the public chastisements inflicted on them. “Who is the wise man, that may understand this,” asked the Prophet Jeremias, when the city of Jerusalem was about to be destroyed, “and to whom the word of the mouth of the Lord may come, that he may declare this, why the land hath perished, and is burnt up like a wilderness? And the Lord said: Because they have forsaken My law, which I gave them, and have not heard My voice, and have not walked in it: but they have gone after the perverseness of their own heart. Therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will feed this people with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink: and I will send the sword after them till they be consumed.”³ Sometimes God punishes a certain family, nay, even His holiest servants, such as Job, Tobias, and others, with temporal calamities and trials; nay, according to the testimony of St. Paul, no pious man can long remain without such crosses; for, as he writes to his disciple Timothy, “all that will live godly in Jesus Christ shall suffer persecution.”⁴ And that He does in order to prove their patience and to increase their glory in heaven; but public calamities and punishments, such as pestilence, war, and famine are never inflicted on a city or land unless on account of the sins and vices of the people. Such is the opinion of the holy Doctor St. Ambrose: “A city is never severely punished, unless on account of the crimes of its inhabitants.”⁵ That is, the only cause of the punishment is sin and nothing else. Why, then, are we so frightened and alarmed at the thought of the troubles that threaten us? It is sin alone that we should hate and dread. “We must take the blame to ourselves,” says Salvianus; “for, since we commit those things on account of which we are tormented, we are

For they
are the sole
cause of our
misfor-
tunes.

¹ Tunc ait paralytico: surge, tolle lectum tuum, et vade in domum tuam. Et surrexit, et abiit in domum suam.—Matt. ix. 8, 7.

² More periti medici morbi causam prius expellit.

³ Quis est vir sapiens, qui intelligat hoc, et ad quem verbum oris Domini fiat, ut annunciet istud, quare perierit terra, et exusta sit quasi desertum? Et dixit Dominus: quia dereliquerunt legem meam, quam dedi eis, et non audierunt vocem meam, et non ambulaverunt in ea, et abierunt post pravitatem cordis sui. Idcirco hæc dixit Dominus exercituum, Deus Israel: ecce ego cibabo populum istum absinthio, et potum dabo eis aquam fellis; et mittam post eos gladium, donec consumantur.—Jerem. ix. 12-16.

⁴ Omnes qui pie volunt vivere in Christo Jesu, persecutionem patientur.—II. Tim. iii. 12.

⁵ Civitati nonnisi propter civium peccata inferitur excidium.—St. Amb. Serm. 85.

the authors of our own misfortunes. Why, then, do we complain of the severity of the punishment we suffer? Each one of us punishes himself."¹ Why do we give way to such care and anxiety as to the best means of averting calamity from our country? Let us only take thought as to how we ought to repent of and avoid sin, for that is the forerunner that opens the door to all kinds of misfortunes.

Which we cannot avoid unless we do penance. Shown by a simile.

"Ye brood of vipers," said St. John the Baptist to the Pharisees, "who hath showed you to flee from the wrath to come?"² How will you escape the punishment that threatens you? "Bring forth, therefore, fruit worthy of penance. For now the axe is laid to the root of the trees."³ The axe, says St. John Chrysostom, is the bitter anger of God, which is at hand. But why does he compare the anger of God to an axe? You have, no doubt, heard, my dear brethren, the fable of the trees; they met on one occasion in order to take counsel as to the best means of escaping the injuries that men inflict on them by cutting, sawing, splitting, and burning. One of them recommended that they should all unite their strength and overwhelm their enemy. No, said another, men are much stronger than we, and violence on our part will only make matters worse; in my opinion the best thing to do would be to offer them a yearly tribute and humbly beg of them not to do us any further harm. What? said the cedar. What is the good of such a plan as that? Do you know how it is that men can do us so much harm? It is because they have axes and other instruments to do it with. Now, what are axes made of? Of a piece of iron or steel, which can cut, and of a wooden handle, by which the tool is held. Now, who has given them the wood? How foolish we are! It is we trees who have done it. Let us, then, agree unanimously not to give them any more wood for tools, and the axe will be powerless in their hands. Do you see the application of this fable, my dear brethren? The axe is already raised and laid to the root of the tree; the anger of God is ready to punish us; what can we do? Shall we resist Him? Ah, we poor worms of the earth would have no chance against His almighty arm! We beg and implore the Lord to have mercy on us and spare us. That is very good and right; but it

¹ Nos nobis accusandi sumus, nam cum ea quibus torquemur admittimus, ipsi tormentorum nostrorum auctores sumus. Quid ergo de peccatorum acerbitate querimus? Unusquisque nostrum ipse se punit. — Salvian. de Gubern., l.

² Progenies viperarum, quis demonstravit vobis fugere a ventura ira? — Matt. iii. 7.

³ Facite ergo fructum dignum poenitentiae. Jam enim securis ad radicem arborum posita est. — Ibid. 8, 10.

is not enough; we must remove the handle of the axe that is raised to hew us down. "Who has placed the wooden handle in the hands of the divine anger?"¹ asks Aresius. "Ourselves," he answers, "and no other."² Our sins are the wood out of which the handle is made. Therefore pray, but at the same time, bring forth fruit worthy of penance, and by the amendment of your lives take away that wooden handle that the divine anger uses against us; otherwise your prayers will do no good.

How we are to act under such circumstances, we can learn from the Hebrews in the Old Testament, although they were not expected to be nearly so perfect as we Christians should be. God had often chastised them with war, famine, and pestilence whenever they had been addicted to vice for a certain length of time; and the first thing they always did to appease His anger was to repent of their sins with contrite hearts, to fast for a whole day until the stars began to appear in the heavens in the evening, to cover their heads with ashes, to exchange their costly clothing for rough sack-cloth, and to gird their loins with hair girdles; such were their outward works of penance and humiliation. In this garb of penance they all went, young and old, to the temple in Jerusalem, and there sent forth their sighs and lamentations to heaven: "For many hours with one voice they cried to God, saying: We have sinned with our fathers, we have done unjustly, we have committed iniquity. Have Thou mercy on us because Thou art good."³ Thus the Hebrews prayed when they were besieged in the city of Bethulia, as you may read in the Book of Judith. Similar descriptions are to be found in the Second Book of Paralipomenon, in the fourteenth, twentieth, and thirty-second chapters, and in the First and Second Books of the Machabees.

How do we Christians act in times of public calamity? We pray, and that is all, and God alone knows with what kinds of hearts. Instead of fasting, we spend our lives in every sort of indulgence, perhaps, until necessity compels us to change; instead of shedding tears of repentance, we continue our old mode of life, remain attached to our old bad habits, and continue in the occasion of sin; instead of sack-cloth, or a style of dress suited to the law of Christian humility, we flaunt about in scandalous attire; and in that guise we cry to heaven, "Have

The Hebrews give us an example of penance.

Which few follow nowadays.

¹ Manubrium ligneum quis illi tribuit?

² Non alii quam nos ipsi.

³ Per multas horas una voce clamaverunt ad Deum, dicentes: peccavimus cum patribus nostris, injuste egimus, iniquitatem fecimus. Tu, quia pius es, miserere nostri.—Judith vii. 18-20.

"Thou mercy on us because Thou art good!" Take pity on us and turn away the plagues with which Thou hast threatened us! Do we think that God will hear our cries? But why should He do so? Is it that we may continue undisturbed in our luxurious, easy, or sinful lives? The times are changed, some will say; we know nothing of the customs of the Jews. But has God changed? Or have we another God since then? Or have we offended God less than the Jews did? Yet in those days the only way in which God wished to be appeased was by general public penance and amendment of life; how, then, can we hope to mitigate His anger without repentance and amendment?

Even if we
do penance,
the change
does not last
long.

But you say, we go frequently to confession; and we are ready to do penance, to go to confession to-morrow on the feast of the Blessed Virgin, and to make a firm resolution to amend. Besides, what are you thinking of? Do you imagine that we are all so very wicked? Are there not many pious Christians in this city and country who send up fervent prayers to heaven? Yes, I acknowledge that with joy of heart, and with the greatest respect towards those of whom you speak. You say that you will go to confession to-morrow. God grant that such may be the case, and that all who are in need of the sacrament may make good confessions! But I am afraid that many will act like the Hebrews of old, who humbled themselves before God in the time of affliction, but as soon as prosperity was restored, they generally returned to their former idolatry, as we read in the Holy Scripture, and again compelled God to take the rod in His hand to chastise them. I am afraid that such will be the case with many Christians who now undertake to do penance. While God actually holds the rod in His hand to strike us, oh, what fine promises we can make! How we protest that we are ready to confess our sins, to go to holy Communion, to amend our lives! But if He hears our prayers and averts the evil from us, as He often does, how do we act! Does our love for God and our zeal in His service become greater? Does the promised amendment of life follow, and is it lasting? Ah, far from it! When do we see more signs of pride, luxury, impurity, gluttony, drunkenness, and forgetfulness of God, than when the good God has mercifully averted a public calamity and has poured down temporal blessings on us? For most people act on the principle expressed in the old rhyme—

.. When the devil was sick, the devil a monk would be;
When the devil was well, the never a monk was he."

Pah! away with that sham penance and the prayers that accompany it! They who are in such dispositions may pray and sigh a long time, but all their prayers and sighs will do little for them.

But then there are many pious and zealous Christians who help us to pray. I acknowledge it again; and I am of the comforting opinion that most Christians in this country lead good lives; and I know, moreover, from the Epistle of St. James that the prayer of the just man penetrates the clouds and is often capable of averting a calamity from a whole country, or at least of retarding it. "For the continual prayer of the just man availeth much."¹ And woe to thee, O city of Treves, if thou hadst not had hitherto many holy servants of God within thy walls, and many holy intercessors in heaven! But in case that there are also many wicked persons amongst us, what have we then to expect? "When one buildeth up, and another pulleth down," asks the wise Ecclesiasticus, "what profit have they, but the labor? When one prayeth, and another curseth, whose voice will God hear?"² The pious inhabitants of a town or country build up for the general welfare; the wicked, on the contrary, pull everything down to the general misfortune; and what sort of a building will be the result? One man can pull down in a day more than ten men can build up together. The pious send forth to heaven their prayers, sighs, and hymns; but the vices of the wicked at the same time cry to heaven for vengeance. For, as St. Gregory says, "every sin" that is committed in a community "has a voice, with which it calls forth the inscrutable and just judgments of God; whose voice shall God hear?"³ If you hear ten sweet and musical voices singing with ten or even fewer inharmonious and untrained voices, what a discord is the result! And which of the two do you hear more distinctly? A sensitive ear perceives the least false note at once. Therefore, if in our present straits a pious, just, and humble Christian prays, like the sinner in the Gospel: God, be merciful to us poor mortals; while at the same time a proud, worldly-minded man cries out: I am not as the rest of men; I am better than the common run of people; I must show that I am as good as so and so; whose voice will God hear? The charitable Christian cries out for mercy by his generosity towards the poor; but the

To no purpose do the good pray, unless the wicked are converted.

¹ *Multum enim valet deprecatio justī assīdua.*—Jas. v. 16.

² *Unus aedificans, et unus destruens: quid prodest illis nisi labor? Unus orans, et unus maledicens: cujus vocem exaudiet Deus?*—Eccles. xxiv. 28, 29.

³ *Omnis iniquitas apud secreta Dei judicā habet voces suas; cujus vocem exaudiet Deus?*

avaricious man by his stinginess or injustice cries out for vengeance. Chaste hearts pray with sweet voices for grace and favor; but the impure swine with their hideous gruntings call down the anger of God. The meek and patient ask for blessings; while the vindictive, passionate, envious detractors and foul-mouthed railers bring down curses and imprecations. The modest and edifying implore happiness and prosperity; but the luxurious children of the world, with their vain and scandalous attire, bring down that woe with which Christ has threatened them. "Whose voice will God hear?" Ah, the wicked overpower the good, and the latter with their pious prayers will do little for the common welfare, unless the former are converted to God with their whole hearts.

**For one
sinner can
bring down
a general
punish-
ment.**

One ill-tuned instrument is enough to ruin a whole orchestra, and one wicked sinner in a town is able to frustrate of their efficacy all the prayers of the just, and to bring down the anger of God on the community. On account of Seba alone the city of Abela was besieged. One disobedient Jonas was the cause of a fearful storm that arose at sea, and endangered the safety of the others who were in the vessel, although they were not partakers in his sin. Nor did the storm cease until Jonas was thrown overboard, as he himself acknowledges: "And he said to them: Take me up and cast me into the sea, and the sea shall be calm to you; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is come upon you."¹ David alone had sinned against God, and yet thousands of his subjects were smitten with the pestilence, as we read in the Second Book of Kings, twenty-fourth chapter. Cæsarius, in his Third Book of Miracles, describes a terrible storm that overtook certain pilgrims who were on their way by sea to the Holy Land. The helmsman and the rowers strained every nerve, but to no purpose, they saw that the ship was on the point of being overwhelmed by the waves; they cried to all the saints in heaven for help, but in vain. In the ship there was a wicked sinner, who, frightened by the obstinate rage of the wind and the sea, entered into himself, and knowing that he was the sole cause of the general peril, repented of and detested his sins with his whole heart; and as there was no priest at hand he confessed aloud to his companions, in order to humble himself all the more sincerely before God, all the crimes that were the occasion of the storm that threatened

¹ Et dixit ad eos: tollite me, et mittite in mare, et cessabit mare a vobis; scio enim ego quoniam propter me tempestas hæc grandis venit super vos.—Jon. 1. 12.

their lives. This means was so efficacious that, as soon as he had finished his confession, the storm abated, and the sky and sea returned to their former tranquillity.¹ But, good Christians will perhaps say, is it our fault if other people lead wicked lives? Let the angry God punish those who deserve it; why should we who are innocent suffer with them? Just God! I must allow Thy inscrutable decrees, which I do not understand, to answer that question! So it is, my dear brethren; all the inhabitants of a country have to suffer on account of the wicked; God is determined to destroy and banish sin; if He cannot do it by the first or second means already mentioned, if they are unable to bring the sinner to repentance, then He is forced to have recourse to the last and most severe, and to punish the whole community with war, famine, or pestilence.

Nevertheless, pious souls, be comforted; although you have to suffer in spite of your innocence, your merits and rewards will be all the greater in the joyful life that awaits you hereafter; while they whom God uses as a rod of chastisement will be thrown into the fire like a dry stick, after they have inflicted the punishment. But you, O sinners, wherever and whoever you are! see what mischief you can cause in a community. You sin and offend your God, and by your bad example and the scandal you give make other souls the accomplices of your vices; or else, if you confine your sins to yourselves, you bring others besides yourselves into misery, for you are the cause why an angry God inflicts on many who are innocent and just the punishments of war, famine, or pestilence. If one only knew who you are, there is reason enough for all to join in expelling you from the community, just as one pitilessly cuts off a deceased limb, lest it should infect the whole body and place it in danger of death. Oh, what terrible curses will be uttered one day against you (and perhaps they are being uttered even now) by all whose misfortune, poverty, and misery you have increased by your wicked lives! Just Judge, they will cry out with angry voices: See, there are those wicked ones who have grievously offended Thee and incurred Thy just anger, thereby bringing misfortune on our land, so that we, although innocent, have, according to Thy just decrees, had to suffer also. They are to blame for the unfruitful seasons which reduced us to such poverty that we could hardly find bread for ourselves and our

Therefore sinners incur a still more grievous malediction.

¹ *Mox ut massam iniquitatis per confessionem eiecit, mare furens siluit, et facta est tranquillitas magna.*—Cæsar., l. iii., mirac. c. 21.

children; for the scarcity which made it difficult for us to clothe ourselves decently; for the hard work that we had to perform in cold and snow, to no purpose, in the fields and vineyards, the only result of our labor being that on account of bad seasons we had to mortgage our property, thus incurring new debts instead of paying the old ones; for the calamitous war that drove us to such straits, and caused us so much misery; for the plague that carried off our children, parents, and dearest friends by a premature death. Their vices are to blame for the despair that seized on some of us, so that we gave ourselves up to the devil, and are lost forever! Just God, where is Thy vengeance?

Conclusion
and resolution
to do
sincere
penance at
once, in
order to
avert im-
pending
calamities.

Ah, sinners, do not wait for those curses to be called down on your heads! Repent! Repent! Surrender to the God whom you have offended, and so avert from this town and country the evils that threaten it. "Deliver him only, and we will depart from the city;" give up the rebels, that is, your sins and vices! Let each one say, with sorrow of heart, what King David said when God punished his vanity in taking the census of his people, by sending a pestilence on his whole kingdom. Seventy thousand of his subjects had already perished, and the angel of death showed no sign of staying his hand, when David, unable to bear the sad spectacle any longer, cried out with sorrow of heart and tearful eyes: "It is I that have sinned; I have done wickedly;"¹ ah, Lord, restrain Thy hand! "These that are the sheep, what have they done?"² How are those innocent sheep to blame for my sin? "Let Thy hand, I beseech Thee, be turned against me, and against my father's house."³ Behold me, O Lord; strike me, but spare my poor people! I am willing to die for them! "The Lord had pity on the affliction, and said to the angel that slew the people: it is enough, now hold thy hand;"⁴ I am satisfied. So should each one of us, O sinners, say with a sorrowful heart: "It is I that have sinned; I have done wickedly;" it is I, O Lord, who have offended Thee so often and so grievously; I am that rebellious Seba who have revolted against my Lord and my God; it is I who have refused to live according to Thy holy law, and have thus brought misfortune on the whole land! I am that disobedient Jonas who have fled from Thy sight, and on whose account this tempest now threatens the people! "These that

¹ *Ego sum qui peccavi; ego inique egi.*—II. Kings xxiv. 17.

² *Isti qui oves sunt, quid fecerunt?*—Ibid.

³ *Vertatur, obsecro, manus tua contra me, et contra domum patris mei.*—Ibid.

⁴ *Misertus est Dominus super afflictione, et ait angelo percutienti populum: sufficit, nunc contine manum tuam.*—Ibid. 16.

are the sheep, what have they done?" Ah, merciful God, what crime have those innocent and just souls committed? What sin are those poor citizens and peasants guilty of, that they should now be punished on my account? "Let Thy hand, I beseech Thee, be turned against me." Wilt Thou avenge Thyself? Thou hast a right to do so, and here am I, the rebel! I offer myself to Thy fatherly chastisement; let me feel Thy rod! I will do penance, O Lord! I will do penance! Throw me like Jonas into the sea; give to my eyes copious tears, that I may drown my sins in the waters of repentance! I will amend my life, and renounce everything that has hitherto displeased Thee and aroused Thy just anger! Let me no longer be the cause of the sufferings of others. And now, O God of endless mercy, do Thou now restrain Thy anger and say to the smiting angel: "It is enough; now hold thy hand;" war, famine, and pestilence, away with you! I have attained the object I had in view with this people; the rebels have surrendered; they are now converted and have given themselves up to Me entirely; I require you no longer! So, my dear brethren, will the good God certainly say and do, if we all make that sincere promise of repentance, and keep it. Amen.

SEVENTIETH SERMON.

ON THE USELESSNESS OF PRAYER WITHOUT PENANCE DURING PUBLIC CALAMITIES.

Subject.

To pray for release from temporal calamity, and not to amend one's sinful ways, is, 1. a prayer which cannot move an angry God to mercy; 2. it is a prayer which renders the divine anger still more bitter.—*Preached in the year 1731, during a time of public prayer.*

Text.

Qui ingredimini per portas has, ut adoretis Dominum, hæc dicit Dominus exercituum Deus Israël: bonas facite vias vestras.
—Jerem. vii. 2, 3.

"Ye that enter in at these gates to adore the Lord, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: make your ways good."

Introduction.

Pray, Christians! pray! It is high time! Punishment is already at hand; nay, it is at our very doors. The elements seem to wage war on us; fire, water, air, heaven, and earth unite their forces for our destruction. Whole towns and districts have in a short time been destroyed by fire, burnt to ashes, and their inhabitants reduced to extreme poverty. Although we could hardly defend ourselves from inundations during the winter, now the water seems to have left us completely, and to have taken the fertility of the earth with it. The air is filled with unhealthy vapors; fevers and other sicknesses are carrying off men and cattle at no great distance from here, so that some of the towns bordering on the Rhine have, according to report, closed their gates as in the time of pestilence. It seems as if the threat uttered by the Lord, in the Book of Leviticus, against the Hebrews, is now about to be fulfilled in us: "I will make to you the heaven above as iron, and the earth as brass."¹ The heavens, to which we have looked so often before for heat and fine weather, have for a long time now distressed and troubled us by their continual dryness. The dried-up earth cries to heaven, so to speak, open-mouthed, for rain, and leaves us not the least hope of reaping any crops. The clouds, if they happen now and then to let a few drops fall, disappear as quickly as possible again, as if they did not bring anything for us. The only promise from the seed that has been sown is, so far, that the hard work of the husbandman will be fruitless; for what is not destroyed by the frost, or torn up by the violent winds, or dried up by the persistent drought, is eaten here and there, even in the most fertile lands, by the mice and other hurtful vermin. What can be the result of that but a general scarcity, that means for the poor man all the pangs of hunger? A short time ago the winter crops alone failed, and what misery we experienced here! There were some people in this town who did not see a bit of bread for two or three days. Pray, Christians! We are really in need of prayer in order to avert from us such great calamities. But wait a little! Hear first what God said to the Israelites by His Prophet Jeremias, when they all flocked to the temple to pray during a time of public calamity: "Stand in the gate of the house of the Lord and proclaim there this word, and say: Hear ye the word of the Lord, all ye men of Juda, that enter in at these gates, to adore the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of

¹ Daboque vobis cœlum desuper sicut ferrum, et terram æneam.—Levit. xxvi. 19.

hosts: make your ways good,"' if you wish Me to help you. "Trust not in lying words, saying: the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. For if you will order well your ways and your doings . . . I will dwell with you in this place."² I say the same to-day in the name of God: "Ye," Christians, "that enter in at these gates to adore the Lord, make your ways good;" amend your lives; do penance for your sins. Public misfortunes and calamities are never inflicted on a country unless on account of the sins and vices of the people. The will of God is that they should repent of those sins, and when they can be induced to do that by no other means, He is compelled to chastise the innocent as well as the guilty, as I showed last year, when similar calamities were impending over us. Therefore we have now evident proof that we have not yet done true penance for our sins; to this penance it is now my duty to exhort you. Without it all our fasting, prayers, and visiting the churches are of no avail. Why? for the following reason:—

Plan of Discourse.

To pray for relief from temporal calamity, and not to amend one's sinful ways, is not a prayer that can move an angry God to mercy. This I shall briefly show in the first part. It is a prayer that renders the divine anger still more bitter, as I shall show in the second part. Let us, then, all pray together, but at the same time do penance and amend our lives. Such shall be the conclusion.

O God of goodness, who even when Thou art angry dost not forget Thy mercy, before we dare to deprecate Thy anger, we sigh forth to Thee humbly with the Catholic Church: "that Thou wouldst vouchsafe to bring us to true penance, we beseech Thee to hear us," through the Mother of mercy and the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

The qualities that are required to make prayer efficacious, so that it can appease the anger of God and avert the punishments with which He threatens us, are humility, fervor, and confidence. God wishes that we should pray to Him, humbly acknowledging

God wishes us to pray to him with humility, fervor, and child-like confidence.

¹ Sta in porta domus Domini, et prædica ibi verbum istud, et dic: audite verbum Domini omnis Juda, qui ingredimini per portas has, ut adoretis Dominum: hæc dicit Dominus exercituum Deus Israel: bonas facite vias vestras.—Jerem. vii. 2, 3.

² Nolite confidere in verbis mendacii, dicentes: templum Domini, templum Domini, templum Domini est; quoniam si bene direxeritis vias vestras et studia vestra . . . habitabo vobiscum in loco isto.—Ibid. 4, 5, 7.

that He alone is the Lord of all, in whose hands are our sickness or health, our prosperity or adversity, our life and death; that it is He alone whom we have to thank for graces and blessings; He alone whom we have to fear and to adore as the Author of the temporal crosses and trials we have to bear. The brazen sky, which appears so merciless, says St. John Chrysostom, the dried-up earth, which has become hard as iron, cry out to us now: see, ye poor mortals! it is not due to your diligence nor to us that we are able to support you; but to the all-ruling God, on whose fatherly Providence and all-wise decrees your lives depend, and without whom neither our influence nor your industry can profit anything. Him you should speak fair; Him alone you should try to keep as your friend. God wishes that we should pray to Him, but with a fervent and constant prayer, by which we show that we appreciate highly His gifts and benefits. There is no Catholic who does not acknowledge that it is God who rules the wind and weather, the rain and sunshine, and commands them according to His good will and pleasure, and that it is God alone who can cause the fruits of the earth to spring up; but, as St. Augustine remarks, since we are accustomed to receive those benefits every year, we do not appreciate those wonderful works of the almighty power as we should, and we take them as matters of course, so that we do not give ourselves much trouble to beg of Him to bestow them on us. And finally, God wishes that we should pray to Him, but with a firm faith and a child-like confidence in His faithfulness and mercy that He will assuredly give us what is necessary for the welfare of both soul and body. Ask, He says, but at the same time He adds almost always, believe that you will receive.

Prayer
without
repentance
and amend-
ment is not
humble.

Now, my dear brethren, we pray, and visit the churches, and sigh, and cry out to God to avert the evils that menace us. But how do we pray? If we continue to wander on the broad road that leads away from heaven, if our evil ways are not amended, if we remain in the same occasions, bad habits, sins and vices, in a word, if we do not do true penance, oh, then away with our prayers! they have neither humility, nor fervor, nor faith and confidence; not a single quality have they which could appease the anger of God. For, in the first place, where is there any sign of humility in prayer when he who prays is in the state of sin, and will not even subject himself to his sovereign God, nor beg pardon for his grievous offences with sorrow of heart, but obstinately persists in his rebellion? Where is his humble ac-

knowledge that he is in sore need of the help of God alone, when he makes no effort to gain God's favor, but presumptuously continues to act as His sworn enemy? If a man offends seriously one like himself, from whom he is afterwards compelled to ask a favor, his first step must be to make a humble apology for the offence offered, for otherwise he knows well that his application for aid will be fruitless. Is it not, then, a shameless thing for a wretched mortal, who knows that he has grievously offended the great God, to dare to ask Him for help in pressing necessities, without humbling himself and imploring pardon and remission of his sins, or to present to Him a petition for relief, having at the same time the intention of continuing to offend Him?

Besides, he who prays and does not intend to do penance or to amend his life cannot be in earnest, much less fervent in his prayer. "How can you expect God to hear you?"¹ is the question that St. Cyprian asks such a man, when you refuse to hear Him calling on you to return to Him? How can your prayer come from the heart, when you merely move your lips and keep your heart obstinately closed? when your lips cry to heaven, but your heart remains hardened in wickedness? No, all your prostrations and genuflections, all your fasting and church-going, all your praying and singing, even supposing that you abstain for a while from your usual sins during the present calamitous time, are only a sham. You are like the wolf, as St. Augustine says: "the wolf may roar, the wolf may tremble, but he still remains a wolf."² The wolf sees a flock of sheep; aha, he thinks, that is a fine opportunity for me! He makes a spring at them, with his mouth watering; but when he comes near he sees the shepherd, who shakes his cudgel and sets his dog at him. He runs back in a fright, trembling in every limb, so that one might think he had turned into a gentle lamb and had lost his ferocity. But wait; the wolf trembles, it is true; but he is still the same wolf; his hasty flight was not intended to show respect for the shepherd; if it was not for him, he thinks, I should have made those sheep feel my teeth. Sinner, when danger threatens you, you begin to tremble and for a short time to keep a restraint on yourself; you go to church with every appearance of humility; you pray and sigh; but why? The shepherd has appeared and threatened you; an angry God menaces you with sickness or some other evil; but you may tremble and speak Him fair as much as you will;

Nor is it fervent or earnest.

¹ Quomodo te audiri a Deo postulas?

² Lupus fremens, lupus tremens, sed semper lupus

you are the same old wolf; you have no intention of giving up for good your wicked life; you are not in earnest with your sighing and praying; you have no desire to show due honor to God, and therefore you need not think that you will be able to influence Him by your prayers.

Much less is
it confident,
and there-
fore it can-
not influ-
ence God.

But suppose that our prayers are so far in earnest that we really desire to be freed from the necessity in which we are, where is our faith, our child-like confidence that God will hear us? If we do not intend to abandon our wicked ways, we cannot have that confidence without which our prayer is worth nothing. "Dearly beloved," says St. John, "if our heart do not reprehend us, we have confidence towards God: and whatsoever we shall ask, we shall receive of Him; because we keep His commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in His sight." King David, after he had repented of his sins and was assured of pardon by the Prophet Nathan, used to cry out to heaven with the greatest confidence when his enemies were persecuting him: "In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded. Bow down Thy ear to me, make haste to deliver me."¹ The Prodigal in the Gospel, when he reflected on his miserable state, and was thereby brought to see his wickedness and bewail it, conceived a firm hope and confidence that he would not be turned away from his father's house, but would again be received into favor. "I will arise and will go to my father," he said to himself, "and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee: I am not now worthy to be called thy son."² I have not acted as becomes thy son; I am now heartily sorry for it; for thou art still my father. And they both had reason to speak like that, for they repented of their sins and detested them. But if I am still in the state of sin, how can I say to God: in Thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me not be confounded, nor abandon me in my present necessity? On what could I base my confidence? On the divine promises? Ah, my bad conscience at once suggests to me the words of the blind man in the Gospel: "Now we know that God doth not hear sinners."³ On the divine goodness and mercy, because He is still my heavenly

¹ Carissimi, si cor nostrum non reprehenderit nos, fiduciam habemus ad Deum, et quidquid petierimus accipiemus ab eo: quoniam mandata ejus custodimus, et ea quæ sunt placita coram eo facimus.—I. John iiii. 21, 22.

² In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in æternum. Inclina ad me aurem tuam; accelera ut eruas me.—Ps. xxx. 2, 3.

³ Surgam, et ibo ad patrem meum, et dicam ei: pater, peccavi in cælum et coram te; jam non sum dignus vocari filius tuus.—Luke xv. 18, 19.

⁴ Scimus autem quia peccatores Deus non audit.—John ix. 31.

Father? But how do I dare to call Him by the sweet name of Father? For my bad conscience says to me, you are the sworn enemy of God! you are the object of His hatred and malediction! you do not belong to the number of His children, but to the children of the vain world, to the children of the impure flesh, to the children of the spirit of evil, amongst whom you still dwell! The emperor Caracalla, wishing to have undisputed sway, murdered his own brother Geta in the very lap of his mother. Suppose now, my dear brethren, that the murderer, with his hands reeking with the blood of his victim, were to present himself before his mother, who is still lamenting the loss of her child, and to beg a great favor from her, do you think he would be likely to receive it? No, nor do you even imagine that he would have the audacity to present a request at such a time. And yet, if I am in the state of sin, I should be guilty of still greater presumption, if, with my hands still reeking with the Blood of the Son of God, whom I crucify and murder anew by my sins, I were to present myself before the throne of God to beg relief in my necessities, knowing well as I do what the Lord says to all sinners by the Prophet Isaias: "When you stretch forth your hands, I will turn away My eyes from you; and when you multiply prayer, I will not hear; for your hands are full of blood."¹ Alas, while I am in such a state I dare not even raise my eyes to heaven; how, then, could I pray with confidence to God and ask His help and protection? How could I with confidence beg of God to do what I will, when I am not disposed to do what He wills me to do? No! To pray for release from temporal calamities and not to amend one's life is a prayer that cannot move God to mercy. Nay, more than that, it is a prayer like that word of which Judith spoke to the priests and elders of the people in Bethulia: "This is not a word that may draw down mercy, but rather that may stir up wrath, and enkindle indignation."² And so it is in reality; prayer without the intention of amendment has something in it that renders the divine anger still more bitter; as we shall now see in the

Second Part.

Must he, then, who is in the state of sin give up prayer altogether? For that seems to be the only conclusion we can arrive

The sick
man who
refuses to

¹ Cum extenderitis manus vestras, avertam oculos meos a vobis; et cum multiplicaveritis orationem, non exaudiam; manus enim vestrae sanguine plene sunt.—Isa. l. 15.

² Non est iste sermo qui misericordiam provocet: sed potius qui iram excitet et furorem accendat.—Judith viii. 12.

take medicine provokes the doctor's anger.

at. It is surely better to remain silent than to excite the anger of God and bring down His wrath on us by praying and speaking to Him. No, my dear brethren, such is not my meaning ; he who is in sin should pray all the more humbly, frequently, and fervently ; but first of all he should implore the grace of repentance and conversion ; for, if he does not wish to repent, it would be far better for him humbly to submit to the divine chastisements, acknowledging that he has richly deserved them, than dare to try to avert those chastisements by his prayer. And why so ? A sick man, whom an experienced doctor has promised to cure, cries and shrieks out at the top of his voice that he will have none of the medicines prescribed, and actually repels the doctor with hand and foot. Now, do you think that such conduct on the part of the patient is likely to win the doctor's esteem ? No, and in place of helping the sick man he will go away in disgust and leave him to perish in his obstinacy. Would not any of us do the same, if we had to deal with such a case ?

The child that struggles against the rod, without promising to amend, embitters the father's anger.

A child that has often been guilty of serious offences is about to be punished by its father. Ah, you graceless child, says the father, threatening it with the stick, will you ever do that again ? The child says nothing, but its sulky demeanor shows plainly enough that it is determined to repeat the fault it has been guilty of. Oh, thinks the father, is that the way with you ? Come here, and I will teach you to amend your ways ! The child begins to cry ; do not beat me ! it says ; I do not wish to be beaten ! and it struggles with might and main to take the rod out of its father's hand. Will that conduct on the child's part soften the father's heart, so that he will throw away the rod and refrain from punishing ? No, certainly not ! And if the father had intended at first to let the child off with a threat, he certainly would not do so when he sees it struggling with him, but would rather beat it far more severely than he would have done if amendment had been promised, or the punishment were obediently submitted to ; nay, he will not cease to inflict the punishment until the obstinate child promises obedience, begs pardon for its faults, and kisses the father's rod in sign of gratitude for the well-deserved chastisement. No sensible father would act otherwise with his child in such circumstances.

Calamities are fatherly chastisements and

My dear brethren, public calamities, pestilence, unfruitful seasons, scarcity, poverty, hunger, war, etc., which are inflicted on a country by the Almighty God : what are they ? They are

rods, scourges, as they are called in the Holy Scripture, with which the just anger of God at first threatens His disobedient and wicked children, and exhorts them to amend; while, if no amendment follows, He strikes hard with those scourges, but with the sole intention of bringing sinners to see the wickedness of their ways and do penance. "He does not strike you," says St. Augustine, "as one enemy would another; but as a father would a son, His object being to correct, not to destroy." His object is to save His children from eternal destruction, and therefore, when He sees signs of amendment, He ceases punishing at once. So much does He Himself give us to understand by the Prophet Jeremias: "I will suddenly speak against a nation and against a kingdom, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy it:"¹ but My intention towards it is not evil; for "if that nation against which I have spoken shall repent of their evil, I also will repent of the evil that I have thought to do to them."² What are public calamities? They are medicines, as St. Augustine assures us: "Let man not forget that God is a physician, and that tribulation is the medicine He employs to restore health."³

medicines;
their object
is to make
us better
and to heal
us.

Now, how do we act? God, like a loving and well-meaning father, threatens us with the rod in His hand. Will you amend your lives? He asks. Will you avoid sin in future? And all those who have hitherto refused to do true penance answer sulkily: no, we will not amend; we shall continue our usual mode of life. Then, says the Almighty, you must feel the weight of My hand, which will force you to amend. But still we cry out and struggle against the punishment; we reject the wholesome medicine; we try to snatch the rod out of the hands of our heavenly Father; that is, we fast, and pray, and beg of Him to avert the calamities that threaten us, and to leave us in peace. Now, what is the meaning of a prayer such as that? Is it not as if we said to God: O God, Thou wilt restore us to health by this salutary, though bitter medicine; but away with Thy medicine; we want none of it! Thou hast seized the rod, like a well-meaning father, to warn and exhort us to amend our sinful lives; but we do not wish to amend; take Thy rod away,

When we
pray with-
out pen-
ance, we re-
ject the
medicines
and strug-
gle against
the punish-
ment.

¹ Non admovet vobis manus sicuti hostis hosti, sed ut pater filio, emendaturus, non perditurus.—8. Aug. de temp. c. vi.

² Repente loquar adversum gentem, et adversus regnum, ut eradicem, et destruiam, et disperdam illud.—Jerem. xviii. 7.

³ Si poenitentiam egerit gens illa a malo suo, quod locutus sum adversus eam, agam et ego poenitentiam super malo quod cogitavi ut facerem et.—Ibid. 8.

⁴ Intelligat homo medicum esse Deum, et tribulationem medicamentum esse ad salutem.

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we do not wish to be warned, nor exhorted, nor chastised, nor forced to amend. The famine and scarcity, and the plagues that follow on them, are so many messengers that Thou sendest forth to announce to us in Thy name that it is Thy intention to punish our pride and vanity, our extravagance and immodesty in dress, so that we may learn to live in a manner becoming Christian modesty and humility, and be ashamed to strut and flaunt about so arrogantly, while so many of our poor brethren and sisters, so many poor citizens and peasants, have great difficulty in finding bread enough to allay the pangs of hunger. They announce to us that it is Thy intention, by withdrawing Thy blessing from us, to chastise our avarice, injustice, usury, and hard-heartedness to the poor, and to withdraw our hearts from earthly goods in order to raise them to heavenly things; to put a stop to impurity and public scandal, and to say to us, in the words of Thy Prophet Jeremias: "Thou hast polluted the land with thy fornications, and with thy wickedness. Therefore the showers were withholden, and there was no lateward rain,"¹ as we have already seen with our own eyes. They announce to us that it is Thy wish, by depriving us of the means of livelihood, and by allowing our fields and vineyards to suffer from unfruitful seasons, to compel us to give up excessive drinking, which is the cause of so many sins, idleness and the vices it gives rise to, dangerous company and nightly gatherings, the abominable habit of cursing and swearing, which brings down the malediction of Heaven on us, and the various forms of superstition, by which we seek help in sickness and other necessities from sorcerers and people of evil reputation. They announce to us that it is Thy intention to correct our sloth in Thy service, our irreverence in Thy churches, our neglect of Thy word, our imprudent talkativeness with regard to the faults of others, our want of reticence in matters that our duty obliges us to keep silent about, and the little care that parents take in the training of their children. In a word, we must amend our lives and endeavor to gain heaven by the rough way of penance, for, as Thou hast assured us, Thy kingdom suffers violence. That is the sole reason, O God, why Thou takest the rod of chastisement in Thy hand; and that is the very thing we do not wish to understand or agree to. We do not want to be brought to see our state; we will remain as we are, in our pride and vanity, in our impurity

¹ Polluisti terram in fornicationibus tuis, et in malitiis tuis. Quamobrem prohibetæ sunt stillæ pluviarum, et serotinus imber non fuit.—Jerem. III. 2, 3.

and dissolute mode of life, in our idleness and intemperance, in our sins and vices; for we do not look on those things as such great evils that we should desire to be freed from them. The temporal calamity with which Thou threatenest us is the only thing we dread; release from that is the only favor we beg of Thee, the only object of our cries to heaven; mercy O God! have mercy on Thy people! "That Thou wouldst vouchsafe to give and preserve the fruits of the earth, we beseech Thee to hear us!" such is the nature of our prayers, and so, in fact, do all pray who, being resolved not to amend their vicious lives, are attached to any of the sins I have mentioned. "They sorrow on account of the stripes inflicted on them," says St. Gregory; "but they do not sorrow for that which is the cause of those stripes."¹

Now, can a prayer of that kind move a fatherly heart to pity and mercy? Must it not excite still more the just anger of God, and compel Him to inflict a more grievous chastisement on His obstinate children? This is what He complains of so bitterly by the Prophet Amos: "I also have given you dulness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places; yet you have not returned to Me, saith the Lord. I also have withholden the rain from you; and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city; yet you returned not to Me, saith the Lord. I struck you with a burning wind; the palmer-worm hath eaten up your many gardens and your vineyards, your olive-groves and fig-groves; yet you returned not to Me, saith the Lord. Therefore I will do these things to thee, O Israel."² Are not these, my dear brethren, the very chastisements with which the angry God has hitherto punished us, and with which He still threatens us? And yet, we will not return to Him, saith the Lord. Mark the emphatic words, "I have given you;" I have commanded the impending calamity to visit you. You must not imagine that it is merely a matter of chance. To Me alone you must ascribe the unfavorable seasons and the drought which burnt up all the seeds, and not to any other cause, as you are accustomed to do in similar circum-

Therefore such prayer only embitters the anger of God against us.

¹ Flagella sua dolent; quare flagelluntur, non dolent.

² Ego dedi vobis stuporem dentium in cunctis urbibus vestris, et indigentiam panum in omnibus locis vestris; et non estis reversi ad me, dicit Dominus. Ego quoque prohibui a vobis imbrem; et plui super unam civitatem, et super alteram civitatem non plui; et non redistis ad me, dicit Dominus. Percussi vos in vento urente; multitudinem hortorum verborum et vinearum vestrarum, olivea vestra, et fœta vestra comedit crura; et non redistis ad me, dicit Dominus. Quapropter hæc faciam tibi, Israel.—Amos iv. 6-9, 12

stances. For there are many who pretend to penetrate the secrets of great potentates, when a war breaks out, and grumble at and find fault with their plans, as if they were to blame for the misfortune; while they ascribe the incessant rain, thunder, and hail storms to vapors ascending from the earth; and if pestilence attacks the people, they soar up to heaven with their thoughts and blame some unfortunate conjunction of the planets for it; but they labor in vain. "I have given you;" I am the supreme Lord, who make use of creatures as instruments with which to chastise the world. I, your well-meaning Father, have sent those punishments on you, not merely because you have aroused My just anger by your sins, but also because I am mercifully inclined to urge you to do true penance, and therefore I complain that, in spite of all I can do, you still persist in your sinful mode of life. But hear how I will deal with you in My just wrath; for I now mean to do something more than threaten: "I also will do these things to you: I will quickly visit you with poverty and burning heat, which shall waste your eyes and consume your lives. You shall sow your seed in vain, which shall be devoured by your enemies."¹ Even if the weather is favorable, the mice and the worms shall eat up your crops. "But if you will not yet, for all this, obey Me, I will chastise you seven times more for your sins. Your labor shall be spent in vain, the ground shall not bring forth her increase, nor the trees yield their fruit. And I will send in upon you the beasts of the field to destroy you and your cattle."²

And we
must blame
our sins for
the just
punishment
we are
suffering.

Let us, then, Christians, cease wondering and complaining if heaven seems to be so hard and merciless to us. God is not wanting either in the power or in the will to help us: "The hand of the Lord is not shortened, that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy, that it cannot hear,"³ such is the assurance given us by the Prophet Isaias. He is still the same Lord who in the beginning brought forth fruits out of the untilled earth, without seed, by His word alone, and He can now in a moment change the apparently miserable condition in which we are,

¹ Ego quoque hæc faciam vobis; visitabo vos velociter in egestate et ardore, qui conficiat oculos vestros, et consumat animas vestras. Frustra seretis sementum, quæ ab hostibus devorabitur.—Levit. xxvi. 16.

² Sin autem nec sic obedieritis mihi, addam correptiones vestras septuplum propter peccata vestra. Consumetur incassum labor vester, non proferet terra germen, nec arbores poma præbebunt. Immittamque in vos bestias agri, quæ consumant vos et pecora vestra.—Ibid. 18, 20, 22.

³ Non est abbreviata manus Domini, ut salvare nequeat, neque aggravata est auris ejus ut non exaudiat.—Isa. lix. 1.

and replace the want that threatens us by the greatest abundance. He is the same Lord who has often helped us already, after we had done penance publicly, and it is our sins alone that we must blame if we are not heard by Him: "Your iniquities have divided between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He should not hear,"¹ such is the answer your own conscience will give you, if you ask it why God takes the rod in His hand now. And it will tell you, too, not that God closes His ears to your prayers, but that He is a just and at the same time a merciful Father, even when He punishes you because you close your ears to His repeated invitations. It will tell you that it is right and just that, since you have so long abused the blessings of God to offend Him, you should now begin to feel the effects of His anger in the withdrawal of those blessings. It will tell you that it is right and just that, since you did not allow yourselves to be drawn gently to acknowledge and repent of your sins by the benefits He has bestowed on you, you should be at last compelled to repent by the pressure of calamity. Truly, "Thy ways and thy devices have brought these things upon thee: this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it hath touched thy heart."² As St. Jerome interprets this text, the sinful works and thoughts of the inhabitants brought evil upon the city. "The ways and thoughts by which they have sinned in word and work have caused all the evil that has happened to it. Therefore we ourselves are to blame for any misfortune that happens us, because we turn the mildness of Our Lord into bitterness, and compel Him to be severe against His will."³ Thus far St. Jerome.

I conclude with the words of my text: "Ye that enter in at these gates to adore the Lord, thus saith the Lord of hosts: Make your ways good;" do penance for your sins. If you do that, I will fulfil the promise I made long ago to My people: "If I shut up heaven and there fall no rain, or if I give orders and command the locust to devour the land; and My people, upon whom My name is called, being converted, shall make supplication to Me, and seek out My face, and do penance for their most

Conclusion
for sinners
and exhortation to the
good.

¹ Iniquitates vestre dividerunt inter vos et Deum vestrum, et peccata vestra absconderunt faciem ejus a vobis, ne exaudiret.—Isa. lix. 2.

² Viæ tuæ et cogitationes tuæ fecerunt hæc tibi: ista malitia tua, quia amara, quia tetigit cor tuum.—Jerem. iv. 18.

³ Viæ illius et cogitationes quibus opere et sermone peccavit, fecerunt ei evenire omnia quæ evenerunt. Quidquid ergo nobis accidit, nostro accidit vitio, qui dulcem Dominum in amaritudinem vertimus, et cogimus sævire nolentem.

wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins, and will heal their land. ¹ Otherwise your prayers and supplications are useless, and they will only have the effect of making My anger greater. Pardon me, my dear brethren, if, instead of consoling you, which I would much rather have done, I have been forced to launch out into invective against sinners! I know that the most of you, who listen with a pious eagerness to holy exhortations, are least to blame for the calamities that threaten us; I know that they who are most in need of being urged to repentance seldom or never come to hear a sermon; and therefore I pity you all the more that, in accordance with a hidden decree of Providence, you have to suffer with and on account of the wicked; but that very circumstance will make hell hotter for them, for by their vices they are the cause of your having to suffer innocently. Do you, then, just and pious souls, pray, and pray humbly, fervently, and with child-like confidence in God; but pray especially and above all for those who are still in the state of sin, and are the cause of all our misfortunes, that they may be converted and repent with their whole hearts. In their stead and for them let us now go down on our knees before the throne of God's mercy, and sigh forth to Him, in the words of the Prophet Isaias, when the people were abandoned by God on account of their sins.

A prayer in
the name of
all sinners.

“Look down from heaven and behold from Thy holy habitation and the place of Thy glory; where is Thy zeal and Thy strength, the multitude of Thy bowels, and of Thy tender mercies? Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; from everlasting is Thy name.” ² O Lord, rebellious and unworthy of Thy grace as we have been hitherto, yet Thou art still our Saviour; Thou hast borne that sweet name from eternity; ah, how, then, couldst Thou allow us to wander so far on the ways of wickedness, and to love Thee and esteem Thee so little? “Why hast Thou made us to err, O Lord, from Thy ways: why hast Thou hardened our heart, that we should not fear Thee? Thou art angry, and we have sinned; in them we have been always. And now, O Lord, Thou art our Father, and we are clay: and Thou art our Maker,

¹ Si clausero cœlum, et pluvia non fluxerit, et mandavero et præcepero locustæ ut devoret terram: conversus autem populus meus, super quos invocatum est nomen meum, deprecatus me fuerit, et exquisierit faciem meam, et egerit poenitentiam a vils suis pessimis: et ego exaudiam de cœlo, et propitiuss ero peccatis eorum, et sanabo terram eorum.—II. Paralip. vii. 13, 14.

² Attende de cœlo, et vide de habitaculo sancto tuo et gloriæ tuæ. Ubi est zelus tuus, et fortitudo tua, multitudo viscerum tuorum et miserationum tuarum? Tu, Domine, Pater noster, Redemptor noster, a sæculo nomen tuum!—Isa. lxiii. 15, 16.

and all we are the work of Thy hands.”¹ Even while Thou art chastising us, Thou art our well-meaning Father; remember, we beseech Thee, our weakness and frailty! “Be not very angry, O Lord, and remember no longer our iniquity: behold, see, we are all Thy people!”² Many of us are sighing and moaning under great afflictions: “Wilt Thou refrain Thyself, O Lord, upon these things? wilt Thou hold Thy peace, and afflict us vehemently?”³ If the sweet name of Father cannot move Thee to mercy, of which I in the name of all sinners must humbly acknowledge myself to be unworthy, then I say with the Prodigal: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee: I am not now worthy to be called Thy son.” It is long since by my wantonness I have excluded myself from the number of Thy children; dost Thou, then, no longer acknowledge me, and hast Thou renounced the name of Father as far as I am concerned? Ah! remember that Thou hast still a Son, in whom Thou art always well pleased, Jesus Christ, my Saviour, by whose precious Blood we are redeemed and consecrated in baptism as Thy children. Wilt Thou not regard that Son of Thine? And therefore, if Thou art still resolved to chastise and to destroy, and to make us feel the weight of Thy hand, behold, here we are! take Thy rod and strike us; we are satisfied! But see at the same time where Thou strikest, lest the innocent Blood of Thy Son should suffer. Thou knowest well, O Lord, that in this archdiocese there are many pious Christians, who mean well with Thee and love Thee with their whole hearts. All these are endowed with sanctifying grace as a pledge of future glory, and a treasure bought by the Blood of Thy Son; see that Thou dost not strike them! Although, if they had to suffer, in spite of their innocence, they would not offer Thee the least opposition, but would kiss Thy rod, and thank Thee with child-like love for Thy chastisements as for favors, because they are always resigned to Thy holy will, and know that Thou dost not mean to harm them, but rather to increase their merit and glory in heaven by the chastisements Thou sendest them. But if, on the other hand, Thou shouldst find some who, as they are in the state of sin, have lost sanctifying grace and no longer bear about them the mark of the Blood of

¹ *Quare errare nos fecisti, Domine, de vils tuis: indurasti cor nostrum, ne timeremus te? Tu iratus es, et peccavimus; in ipsis fulmus semper. Et nunc, Domine, pater noster es tu, nos vero lutum; et flector noster tu, et opera manuum tuarum omnes nos.*—Isa. lxiii. 17: lxiv. 5, 8.

² *Ne irascaris, Domine, satis, et ne ultra memineris iniquitatis nostræ! ecce respice: populus tuus omnes nos.*—Ibid. lxiv. 9.

³ *Numquid super his continebis te, Domine, tacebis, et affliges nos vehementer?*—Ibid. 12.

Thy Son, these, O Lord, are the people on whom Thou canst justly vent Thy anger. Smite them, and spare not, even if I should be of their number! Yet, hold! even for them the Blood of Thy Son cries out for mercy! Therefore, strike them, avenge Thyself on them, not in Thy wrath, but rather with fatherly anger! Touch with Thy rod their hitherto hardened hearts; soften them; pierce them; fill them with sorrow; leave them no peace day or night, until they fully realize the enormity of the sins by which they have provoked Thy just anger, sincerely repent of them, confess them candidly, and amend their lives steadfastly! Then, being fully appeased, Thou wilt cease to be angry with them, and wilt lay down the rod of chastisement, while we, freed from trouble and anxiety, shall be able to serve Thee in peace and quiet and to love Thee, our Supreme Good, with all our hearts. Such is the prayer that we all, sinners as well as just, offer Thee, through Thy own most beloved Son and our elder Brother, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost.

Text.

Vade prius reconciliari fratri tuo: et tunc veniens offeres munus tuum.—Matt. v. 24.

“Go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift.”

Introduction.

If God rejects the offering made Him unless he who makes it is first reconciled to his neighbor, with whom he has lived perhaps at enmity, as Christ expressly says in to-day's gospel: “If, therefore, thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave there thy offering before the altar,” for it is not pleasing to Me, “and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift,” and I will accept it from thee; if that is so, I say, how much less will the God of all holiness look with favor on the offering of one who is at enmity with Him? Oh, no, away with such an offering! For you must first go and be reconciled to your God. My dear brethren, we often come to the church to present our gifts to God; we offer Him a gift of infinite value in the holy sacrifice of the Mass; we offer Him the gift of our lips by fervent prayer, when we

lay our wants before Him in order to implore His help; but how are our hearts disposed meanwhile? Are we always at peace with our neighbor? Nay, have we really been reconciled to God by true penance and the amendment of our lives? If we do not fulfil this latter condition, then our prayers and offerings are not acceptable. We must first go and be reconciled to God, and change our wicked ways; otherwise we shall be able to effect nothing.—*Plan of Discourse as above.*

SEVENTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON PRAYER AND PENANCE DURING THE TIME OF SICKNESS.

Subject.

God, when He visits us with sickness, wills that we should acknowledge Him as our Lord and Saviour, and take refuge with Him by prayer and true penance.—*Preached in the year 1733.*

Text.

Ego enim Dominus sanator tuus.—Exod. xv. 26.

“I am the Lord thy healer.”

Introduction.

The ancient Romans, as Giraldus tells us, used to go to the Quirinal Hill every year and there with great solemnity offer sacrifice to their gods to obtain the gift of health; but the remarkable thing about this custom was that they never offered such sacrifices when they were really sick, but either before or after an attack of illness or the appearance of an epidemic. What their idea was in that the historian does not say. In my opinion they had such little confidence in their gods that they did not think them able to heal sickness, or else they imagined that sickness did not come from the gods, or else, and if such was the case they put many Christians to shame, they wished to show that they preferred to be induced to reverence the gods by gentle means, such as prosperity, than to be compelled to do so by the pressure of adversity. However that may be, we Christians have a true God, who is the sole Author of all temporal evils, and at the same time our only Helper in them, and He wishes us to acknowledge Him as such; nay, for that very reason He

sends us trials, that we may without delay fly to Him for refuge. How often has He not shown that to be His will with His chosen people, the Israelites? In the Book of Exodus we read that He had punished them with want of water, so that they could not quench their thirst. "And they marched three days through the wilderness, and found no water. And they came into Mara, and they could not drink the waters of Mara, because they were bitter. And the people murmured against Moses, saying: What shall we drink?"¹ Whereupon he cried to God for help. Listen, Moses, was the answer God gave him; do you know why I have sent this affliction on My people? They do not always acknowledge Me as their Lord; now go and say to them: "If thou wilt hear the voice of the Lord thy God, and do what is right before Him, and obey His commandments, and keep all His precepts, none of the evils that I laid upon Egypt will I bring upon thee; for I am the Lord thy healer."² That you must know, and as such you must acknowledge Me. My dear brethren, what are our circumstances at present? Sad is the news we receive from the neighboring as well as the more remote parts of the Roman empire: the waters of the sea threaten to cause an inundation, nay, seem likely to destroy altogether the maritime cities. Vienna, Wurtzburg, Mayence, Coblentz, Cologne, and other towns are crying for mercy to heaven on account of the different epidemics that afflict them to such a degree that there is hardly a house in one of those places which is free from sickness, while in some of them the number of the infected is so great that the churches and schools are half empty and deserted, and the doctors are altogether too few to attend to all who require their help. But we need not go outside our own city to find out the extent of the evil; the schools, public devotions, sodalities, and the attendance at sermons seem to show that there is only a fourth of the usual number of inhabitants in the city. Many tradesmen and laborers are unable to work, and, of course, cannot find bread for themselves and their families, while the constant coughing and groaning of those who are here present is a sufficient indication of what is the matter with many of them. What are we to do in such circumstances? Are we to wait,

¹ Ambulaveruntque tribus diebus per solitudinem, et non inveniebant aquam: et venerunt in Mara, nec poterant bibere aquas de Mara, eo quod essent amaræ. Et murmuravit populus contra Moysen, dicens, quid bibemus?—Exod. xv. 22, 23.

² Si audieris vocem Domini Dei tui, et quod rectum est coram eo feceris, et obedieris mandatis ejus, custodierisque omnia præcepta illius, cunctum languorem, quem posui in Ægypto, non induc in super te; ego enim Dominus sanator tuus.—Ibid. 26.

like the ancient Romans, till the evil has passed over? No, O merciful God! with folded hands and suppliant voices we unanimously implore Thy help; we acknowledge that Thou art the only One who can help us; and if Thou refusest Thy help, we must conclude that a still greater evil is in store for us. This, my dear brethren, is what God seeks from us by the calamities with which He afflicts us, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

God wills now especially that we should humbly acknowledge Him as the Lord who alone can help and heal us, and therefore we must at once fly to Him for refuge, partly by prayer and partly by repentance and the amendment of our lives. Such is the whole subject.

O God of goodness, help us by Thy grace to pray and do penance; this we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

There is many a one who, as long as he is in good health, takes no trouble to find out whether there is a doctor or an apothecary in the place where he is living; for he is not in need of either. But when he feels some change in his blood, as a sign that he is about to be attacked by a fever, he is not long in finding out where the doctor lives. The mere report of the approach of the enemy is sometimes enough to inspire with dread the soldier who, while he was safe within the walls, did not deign even to think of him, and to arouse him to take every measure to resist the attacks of the advancing foe. Even on the high seas, while the wind is fair, one might hear the sailors laugh, joke, and amuse themselves; but when the sky begins to get overcast, and the tempest howls in the rigging, the laughter is soon changed into cries and shouts, while every man runs to his allotted place to take in sail or get the anchor ready, calling out meanwhile to God and all the saints for help. And so it is in all dangers and calamities; they awaken the sluggish memory, so that one quickly recalls to mind what he would otherwise have forgotten, namely, who it is to whom he must apply for help.

There, my dear brethren, you have the principal design of the Almighty in afflicting a town or district with calamities. In the time of prosperity, when no one feels the pressure of misfortune, and there is nothing particular to dread, either immediately or in the future, oh, how many there are, even amongst Catholics, of whom one might say with truth, in the words of the

Impending calamity teaches us to know Him who can help us.

Most people forget God in the time of prosperity.

Psalmist: "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."¹ That is, as Vatablus remarks on this text, "there is no judge nor ruler to punish the crimes of men, and to look after their affairs."² At all events, they indulge as freely and unrestrainedly in their accustomed vices, in their pride, avarice, and injustice, in their impurity and public scandal-giving, in their hatred and enmity, in their gluttony and drunkenness, in their neglect of their children, idleness, extravagance in dress, in the hateful habit of cursing and swearing, of calumny and detraction, and in the other sins that spring from those vices, as if there was no God in heaven, or as if He were a god of stone or wood, a deaf and dumb god, from whom they have nothing to fear. How many there are amongst Catholics who wish, so to speak, to have nothing to do with God, and who say to Him in their hearts, with the wicked of whom we read in the Book of Job: "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."³ We do not wish to be instructed in Thy law, nor to find out the right path to heaven. For they come seldom to sermons, or rather, they are as much afraid of them, lest they should be disturbed in their vicious habits, and their consciences be aroused to feel the state in which they are, as if they were above the rank of ordinary people and were not in need of the inspirations and enlightening graces of God. So seldom do they put in an appearance in the church, or receive the sacraments, or raise their minds and hearts to heavenly things, that they seem to imagine that they can do without God, and that the eternity of heaven and hell is a mere fable; for it is only a stern command, under pain of mortal sin and the threat of everlasting damnation, that can induce them to fulfil the more obvious duties of religion. In a word, they act as if they did not acknowledge God for their sovereign Lord. Hence the many complaints that God uttered of His chosen people, of which we read so frequently in the Holy Scripture: "Thou hast forsaken the God that begot thee, and hast forgotten the Lord that created thee,"⁴ brought thee out of the nothingness thou wert, and gave thee all thou hast; so we read in the Book of Deuteronomy. "They kept not the covenant of God," is the complaint of the Lord by the Prophet David, "and in His law they would not walk. And they forgot

¹ Dixit insipiens in corde suo, non est Deus.—Ps. xlii. 1.

² Non est iudex, non est moderator, qui scelera hominum puniat, et res humanas curet.

³ Recede a nobis, et scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus.—Job xxi. 14.

⁴ Deum qui te genuit dereliquisti, et oblitus es Domini, Creatoris tui.—Deut. xxxii. 18

His benefits.”¹ And again, “They forgot God, who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt.”²

What is to be done, O Lord? How wilt Thou bring to a due knowledge of Thee those men who have so ungratefully forgotten Thee? Such is the question asked by St. Augustine. “Thou wilt bring back the people in Thy anger,”³ is his answer. A wilful boy, whose whole idea is play and amusement, cannot bear to hear anything about school; if his father or mother tells him to go there, he pretends not to hear, or feigns illness; and when the school-bell rings he feels like one who is about to be led out to execution. But, wait! his father cries out; I will show you that you have to go to school! And so he takes the stick, or pulls his ears, or seizes him by the arm and packs him off; for there is no use in threatening one who is sensible to physical force alone. In the same way, according to St. Augustine, God acts towards men; our heavenly Father grows angry with those disobedient children of His, who wish to free themselves from His authority; He chastises them with His rod, and in different ways compels them to fly to Him for refuge.”⁴ Such was the school in which He taught the Israelites whenever they forgot Him and ran after false gods. Such, too, was the lesson He gave the obdurate Pharaoh, the disobedient Jonas, the proud Nabuchodonosor, the unchaste Ninivites. It was by means of scourges, chastisements, calamities, and adversity that He humbled them all, and forced them to acknowledge Him as their true God and Lord, and to beg His pardon. Origen considers the case of Pharaoh alone. Hear how that obstinate king speaks when Moses asks him in the name of God to allow the people of Israel to leave Egypt. “Who is the Lord that I should hear His voice and let Israel go?”⁵ Why should He command me? “I know not the Lord; neither will I let Israel go.”⁶ Was not that great insolence on his part? But let him wait a little, and he will soon change his note, when he feels the plagues. “And Aaron stretched forth his hand upon the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt.”⁷ What do

Therefore God visits us with calamities, that we may acknowledge Him.

¹ Non custodierunt testamentum Dei, et in lege ejus noluerunt ambulare; et obliti sunt benefactorum ejus.—Ps. lxxvii. 10, 11.

² Obliti sunt Deum qui salvavit eos, qui fecit magnalia in Ægypto.—Ibid. cv. 21.

³ In ira populos deduces.

⁴ Iratus pater filio eum colaphizat, cædit, aurem vellicat.

⁵ Quis est Dominus, ut audiam vocem ejus et dimittam Israel?—Exod. v. 2.

⁶ Nescio Dominum, et Israel non dimittam.—Ibid.

⁷ Et extendit Aaron manum super aquas Ægypti, et ascenderunt ranæ, aperueruntque terrain Ægypti.—Ibid. viii. 6.

you think now, Pharaoh? Do you still ignore the Lord? How soon he changed his mind! "But Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said to them: Pray ye to the Lord to take away the frogs from me and my people; and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord."¹ Truly, his language is wonderfully changed! And the change was caused by the rod. The same king became still more humble afterwards, when he had felt the plague of the thunder and hail-storms. "And Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron, saying to them: I have sinned this time also; the Lord is just; I and my people are wicked. Pray ye to the Lord that the thunders of God and the hail may cease; that I may let you go, and that ye may stay here no longer."² Behold, says Origen, how Pharaoh, although he was hardened in wickedness, yet learned to acknowledge his sin and to confess that the Lord is God, "when he had been chastised."³ So easy is it for the almighty God to make obstinate sinners learn their duty to Him.

And now
He visits us
with sick-
ness as a
general
punish-
ment.

In the same way the Almighty appears to speak to the sinful world nowadays. You do not wish to know Me, He says, nor to fear or love Me, after all the benefits I have bestowed on you; I must, then, have recourse to another means, in order to show you who I am; I will visit you with the rod, and then "you shall know that I am the Lord,"⁴ and that I hold in My hands your bodies and souls, and all you have; and now I will punish you with My rod, which I will stretch out over all without exception, great and small, rich and poor, that all may know and confess that I am the Lord. I have often chastised you with unfruitful seasons; but I saw that it was a severe punishment only for the lower classes, the poor and needy citizens and peasants; they had to suffer the pangs of hunger, although the other miseries of their lives should have taught them to fly to Me for refuge; but the rich and wealthy, what had they to suffer? They had means enough to procure food during the scarcity. Nay, some of them contrived to grow richer by usury during the pressure of the hard times. That usury is a vice that I hate exceedingly, and I have already complained of it by My Prophet Amos: "Hear this, you that crush the poor, and make the needy

¹ Vocavit autem Pharaoh Moysen et Aaron, et dixit eis: orate Dominum, ut auferat ranas a me et a populo meo, et dimittam populum, ut sacrificet Domino.—Exod. viii. 8.

² Misitque Pharaoh et vocavit Moysen et Aaron, dicens ad eos: peccavi et jam nunc; Dominus justus; ego et populus meus impii. Orate Dominum, ut desinant tonitrua Dei et grando; ut dimittam vos, et nequaquam hic ultra maneatis.—Ibid. ix. 27. 28.

³ Ecce Pharaoh durissimus, tamen profuit verberatus.

⁴ Scietis quia ego Dominus.—Ezech. vi. 13.

of the land to fail, saying: When will the month be over, and we shall sell our wares; and the sabbath, and we shall open the corn; that we may lessen the measure, and increase the sicle, and may convey in deceitful balances, that we may possess the needy for money, and the poor for a pair of shoes, and may sell the refuse of the corn.”¹ But the Lord knows how to punish such avarice. “The Lord hath sworn against the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget all their works. Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein, and rise up altogether as a river, and be cast out and run down as the river of Egypt?”² I have often punished you with war; but even that afflicted most the common people, who had to work hard to pay the tribute imposed by the enemy. The wealthy were able to contribute their share without trouble, so that they still remained in their forgetfulness of Me. But now I will strike with a rod that all shall feel; I will fill the air with pestilential vapors, which all without exception shall have to breathe; and no matter how carefully they look after themselves at home by their firesides, every breath they draw shall fill them with disease; nor shall even one of them be free from the fear of infection; “and you shall know that I am the Lord,” your Supreme God, who has the right of commanding you, and from whom you must beg the gift of health by humble prayer and penance.

And to teach you that I am an almighty Lord, and that it is very easy for Me to compel you to come to My school, I will begin your punishment by things that in your estimation are mean and of no account. When earthly princes wish to subdue a country or to lay it waste, they must have a large army of well-armed soldiers to carry out their wishes, otherwise they will fail in their attempt; and that is a proof of their weakness, since of themselves they can do nothing, and all their strength comes from other sources. It is not so with Me. When I wished to bring king Pharaoh and his people to acknowledge Me, I did not send soldiers to attack him or to lay waste his country; I made use of the meanest animals for that purpose, such as grasshoppers,

He makes use of very mean instruments, that we may confess that He is the Lord.

¹ Audite hoc qui conteritis pauperem, et deficere facitis egenos terræ, dicentes: quando transibit mensis, et venundabimus merces; et sabbatum, et aperiemus frumentum: ut imminuamus mensuram, et augeamus siclum, et supponamus stateras dolosas; ut possideamus in argento egenos et pauperes pro calceamentis, et quisquillas frumenti vendamus?—Amos viii. 4-6.

² Juravit Dominus in superbiam Jacob: si oblitus fuero usque ad finem omnia opera eorum. Numquid super isto non commovebitur terra, et lugebit omnis habitator ejus? et ascedet quasi fluvius universus, et ejicietur et defluet quasi rivus Egypti?—Ibid. 7, 8.

frogs, flies, and mice, that people trample under foot; and by their means I speedily attained My object. Yes, O God of infinite power! we must confess with Solomon that Thou hast no need of borrowing strength from others if Thou art inclined to destroy the world: "For the almighty hand which made the world of matter without form, was not unable to send upon them a multitude of bears, or fierce lions, or unknown beasts of a new kind, full of rage, either breathing out a fiery vapor, or sending forth a stinking smoke, or shooting horrible sparks out of their eyes: whereof not only the hurt might be able to destroy them, but also the very sight might kill them through fear;"¹ but Thou wert not in need, O Lord, of such mighty instruments to fulfil Thy purpose! "For great power always belonged to Thee alone: and who shall resist the strength of Thy arm? For the whole world before Thee is as the least grain of the balance, and as a drop of the morning dew, that falleth down upon the earth."² The smallest insects that we crush between our fingers are enough for Thy almighty power to plunge us into the greatest misery, nay, to destroy us utterly, if such is Thy will; and therefore Thou callest them Thy host: "And I will restore to you the years which the locust, and the bruchus, and the mildew, and the palmer-worm hath eaten; my great host, which I sent upon you:"³ as Thou sayest by Thy Prophet Joel.

He torments us now with worms and with apparently trifling maladies.

And so it is, my dear brethren. The Lord seems to say to us now: I have in My power other plagues with which to afflict the world; I need only give a sign to the raging sea, and it will outstep its bounds and inundate the countries bordering on it; and that I have often done in order to show the might of My arm. In the year 1400 I commanded the three rivers the Rhine, the Maas, and the Waal to overflow their banks; they obeyed at once and submerged seventy-two villages, and drowned a hundred thousand people. On another occasion I commanded the river Dyle to overflow, and in one inundation it destroyed the walls and many of the towers of the town of Louvain in Brabant, and

¹ Non enim impossibilis erat omnipotens manus tua, quæ creavit orbem terrarum ex materia invisa, immittere illis multitudinem ursorum, aut audaces leones, aut novi generis ira plenas ignotas bestias, aut vaporem igneum spirantes, aut fumi odorem proferentes, aut horrendas ab oculis scintillas emittentes; quarum non solum læsura poterat illos exterminare, sed et aspectus per timorem occidere.—Sap. xi. 19-20.

² Multum enim valere tibi soli supererat semper, et virtuti brachii tui quis resistet? Quoniam tanquam momentum stateræ, sic est ante te orbis terrarum, et tanquam gutta roris antelucani, quæ descendit in terram.—Ibid. 22-23.

³ Reddam vobis annos quos comedit locusta, bruchus, et rubigo, et eruca: fortitudo mea magna, quam misi in vos.—Joel ii. 25.

threw down two hundred houses. Ask what was the origin of Lough Erne in Ireland, which is thirty miles long and fifteen broad; and you will be told that in the place it now occupies there was formerly a citadel and a well-inhabited land; but I allowed the waters to inundate the country, which they destroyed with its inhabitants. Holland, Friesland, and other countries lying on the sea and on large rivers have often experienced to their great misfortune how mighty is My arm, when I make use of water as a means of punishing men. And you, too, O city of Treves, have had the same experience! Read your history, and it will tell you what occurred in the years 1296 and 1333, when the Moselle overflowed its banks, rose even above the bridges, and destroyed the walls and many of the houses of the city. I caused the Red Sea to swallow up Pharaoh and all his host, so that not one of them escaped; and in the general deluge all the inhabitants of the world perished, with the exception of eight souls. I could at any moment inflict similar chastisements on you; but it is not necessary for Me to do so; I will entrust the affair to the worms; they, in spite of their small size and weakness, will be able to keep you in constant alarm, and your anxiety to defend yourselves against them will teach you to recognize Me and to pray to Me humbly for release from the plague. Besides, I have mortal illnesses, fevers and pestilence at My command, which I could easily send amongst you at any time to destroy you utterly. I have done that already in Egypt, when in one night the first-born of every family and even of beasts was slain. I did it, too, in the camp of king Sennacherib, when I sent My angel to carry off by plague a hundred and five thousand soldiers in one night. In the same way, too, I punished the vanity of king David, when I caused seventy thousand of his subjects to die of pestilence in three days. In later times I have often inflicted a similar punishment on different towns in Italy, France, and other countries. O city of Treves! if your old buildings could speak, what a lamentable story could they not tell of the effects of the plagues I sent upon you at different times, especially in the years 1313, 1605, 1636, when your inhabitants were reduced to such extremities that there were mothers who ate their own offspring. I might deal just as severely with you now, if I wished; but it is not necessary. I can send you colds, catarrhs, toothache, ulcers in the ears and neck, coughs, and pains in the side, to vie with each other in tormenting you: "And you shall know that I am the Lord:" those

things shall teach you that I am your God, and you may learn from them how severely I might punish you, if I wished to use the power of My almighty arm.

These
plagues He
intends as a
warning to
us.

Certainly, my dear brethren, it is a remarkable thing that God can teach us by such trivial plagues. "If a slight tribulation can instruct, amend, and correct us," I say with St. Jerome, "how much more will not greater ones have that effect?"¹ That is the reason why the Lord now warns us with fatherly goodness, that we may avoid greater calamities. Wonderful is the manner in which the angry God speaks in the Book of Deuteronomy: "I live forever. If I shall whet my sword as the lightning, and my hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to my enemies, and repay them that hate Me."² Why does He say, "like the lightning," and not like a thunderbolt? This latter is more to be dreaded, and would be better means of showing His anger against the world. True; but He wishes to let us see that He is not always intent on our destruction when He punishes, but rather wishes to warn us in time, lest we should incur more grievous chastisements. There is a great difference between a flash of lightning and a thunderbolt; the former is a threat on the part of the heavens, while the latter is the fulfilment of the threat; the one frightens, while the other destroys what it strikes; and the one gives us warning of the danger that is to be feared from the other.

As He is
used to do
at all times.

Such is the way in which the God of goodness deals with us men. Before placing on our shoulders a heavy cross of tribulation, He threatens us, that we may have time to provide for ourselves, and escape the punishment. He could keep still and strike us without warning; but, as Origen says, "He has not done so yet; when He has already pronounced sentence, He still lets us know what He intends to say, that they who deserve condemnation on account of sin may be freed from it by repentance."³ He had already pronounced sentence on the wicked Ninivites, and condemned their city to destruction; yet He did not wish to keep the sentence secret, but commanded His Prophet Jonas to announce it to them, and to give them forty days' respite, that

¹ Si parva tribulatio docet, emendat, et corrigit, quanto magis et magna?

² Vivo ego in æternum. Si acervo ut fulgur gladium meum, et arripuerit iudicium manus mea, reddam ultionem hostibus meis, et his qui oderunt me retribuam.—Deut. xxxii. 40, 41.

³ Nunquam hoc fecit: etiamsi condemnaverit, dicit quod sibi semper dicere propositum est, ut liberentur a condemnatione per poenitentiam, qui condemnati fuerant per delictum.—Origen. hom. i. in Jerem., c. 1.

they might have time enough to escape destruction and to obtain His mercy by timely repentance. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrha, Adama and Seboim, were doomed to destruction with their inhabitants, on account of the hideous vices to which they were addicted; yet God told Lot to warn them, that they might by repentance avoid the flames that were to consume them. The Jewish people were condemned to the most oppressive slavery, and many years beforehand God commanded the Prophet Jeremias to give notice to them of the calamity impending over them. The Prophet warned them incessantly during the reigns of three successive kings, that they might do penance and escape the threatened evils; and when they were actually carried off prisoners, he still exhorted them to penance, assuring them that there was still time to be rescued from captivity: "Behold you are now in captivity; do penance, late as it is; ask Me, and I will spare you; for I, who allowed you to be led into captivity, can deliver you;"¹ thus far Origen. St. Jerome, considering the same truth, adds other examples to those adduced by Origen. For a hundred and twenty years before the Deluge God warned the world of what was to happen, and by His servant Noe gave notice of the punishment that was to overtake it. Seven years before the famine came on Egypt, Joseph foretold it. Before the kingdom of Israel was subjected to the Assyrians, He gave warning of that calamity by the Prophet Amos. Many similar examples might be adduced from Scripture to show that God always gives warning of the chastisements He intends to inflict. And why? "That," as St. Jerome says, "they who hear of those punishments may do penance and so avoid them."² For the God of goodness and clemency always announces the chastisements He intends to inflict, that He may not be compelled to inflict them, since he who threatens shows that he does not wish to smite the offender."³ And commenting on the text of St. Paul to the Romans, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and injustice of those men that detain the truth of God in injustice,"⁴ the same St. Jerome says: "The anger of God is revealed that it may terrify, and may not

¹ Ecce captivi facti estis; agite licet sero poenitentiam; rogate me, et parcam vobis; possum eruere de captivitate qui tradidit.

² Ut qui audirent ventura supplicia, agerent poenitentiam et tormenta vitarent.—S. Hieron. l. i. in Amos.

³ Clemens et benignus Deus semper futura prænuntiat, ne cogatur Inferre supplicia; qui prædicit non vult punire peccantes.

⁴ Revelatur enim ira Dei de cælo super omnem impietatem et injustitiam hominum eorum, qui veritatem Dei in injustitia detinent.—Rom. i. 18.

fall upon those who are terrified.”¹ And elsewhere he quotes the words of the Prophet Sophonias: “Assemble yourselves together, be gathered together, O nation not worthy to be loved: before the decree bring forth the day as dust passing away, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you.”² With these words the Prophet invites sinners, who are hateful to God, to be converted all together, before the threat of their destruction be executed, a threat that is as easily fulfilled as the dust is carried away by the wind. Oh, what goodness on the part of God! says the holy Doctor. It would have been enough for Him to describe the terrible advent of those calamities; but since He did not wish to take the rod in His hand at once, He Himself invites sinners to repent: “Since He does not wish to punish, but merely to terrify, He invites sinners to repent, that He may not have to carry out His threats.”³

If we do
not amend
then, He
will punish
us more
severely.

What is it that now excites our fears, my dear brethren? It is the different epidemics that threaten us. And we have cause to fear; but so far we have seen only the threats and warnings that God sends us, as forerunners to exhort us to return to Him by true repentance and amendment of life. Woe to us if we do not profit by those warnings, and if we defer conversion until the thunderbolt smites us! King Saul was for two months despised by his subjects, although they had chosen him king. For a time he kept quiet and bore it patiently; but when people began to speak of this rebellious spirit, he could restrain himself no longer: “And the spirit of the Lord came upon Saul when he had heard these words, and his anger was exceedingly kindled.”⁴ What did he do? “And taking both the oxen he cut them in pieces, and sent them into all the coasts of Israel by messengers, saying: Whosoever shall not come forth, and follow Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen.”⁵ And that was enough. The people at once followed Saul, as the sheep do their shepherd. “And the fear of the Lord fell upon the people, and they went out as one man.”⁶ Sinners, you who do not

¹ Revelatur ut terreat, et territis non inferatur.—S. Hieron. l. ii. in Habac. iii.

² Convenite, congregamini, gens non amabilis, priusquam pariat jussio quasi pulverem transeuntem diem, antequam veniat super vos ira furoris Domini.—Sophon. ii. 1, 2.

³ Quia non vult inferre supplicia, sed tantum terrere passuros, ipse ad poenitentiam provocat, ne faciat quod minatus est.—Hieron. in Sophon. ii.

⁴ Insillivit Spiritus Domini in Saul, cum audisset verba hæc, et iratus est furor ejus nimis.—I. Kings xi. 6.

⁵ Assumens utrumque bovem, concidit in frusta, misitque in omnes terminos Israel per manus nunciorum, dicens: quicumque non exierit, et secutus fuerit Saul et Samuel, sic fiet bobus ejus.—Ibid. 7.

⁶ Invasit ergo timor Domini populum, et egressi sunt quasi vir unus.—Ibid.

acknowledge your Lord and God, and who refuse to be converted to Him, beware lest He should give way to His just anger! If you hear of any calamity befalling any people, even at a distance from you, look upon that news as a messenger sent to say to you: "so shall it be done to you." You may sometimes hear that a plague has broken out in some neighboring or remote place, and that it carries off hundreds daily; that is a warning given you by God, and the meaning of it is, "so shall it be done to you." A long-continued scarcity of food causes many poor people to die of hunger; the Lord wishes thereby to remind you that "so shall it be done to you," unless you do penance. You may hear the complaints of poor citizens of a certain town, who have lost all they had in a conflagration; their complaints cry out to you, "so shall it be done to you." News comes from many provinces that a marauding soldiery has plundered the inhabitants and driven them out of their houses; that reminds you that "so shall it be done to you." You are told that a fearful storm has destroyed the crops in the fields and vineyards; that is to remind you that "so shall it be done to your fields and vineyards, too." In another place, an earthquake has ruined whole towns and villages; that is a voice which calls out to you in the name of God, "so shall it be done to your towns and dwellings." And truly so shall it be, says the Lord, unless you profit by My fatherly warnings, and return to Me by true penance; for I will no longer be satisfied with the small afflictions I sent you hitherto, but will act towards you as I did long ago to Pharaoh, to whom I sent My servant Moses to say: "Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews. Let My people go to sacrifice to Me. But if thou refuse, behold, My hand shall be upon thy fields...and upon thy horses, and asses, and camels, and oxen, and sheep."¹ In those and similar ways I will utterly destroy you.

O God of goodness, we do not wish to wait for those severe measures! We have felt Thy chastising hand sorely enough already! Behold, we all kneel before Thy throne of mercy with contrite hearts. We acknowledge with deep humility that Thou art our only God and sovereign Ruler, and that Thou alone canst help us. We kiss reverently Thy fatherly rod, which Thou hast used so mildly and mercifully to persuade us to acknowledge

Humble
confession
and purpose
of amend-
ment.

¹ Hæc dicit Dominus Deus Hebræorum: dimitte populum meum ut sacrificet mihi. Quod si adhuc renuisti: ecce manus mea erit super agros tuos, et super equos, et asinos, et camelos, et boves, et oves.—Exod. ix. 1-3.

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Thee and to amend our sinful lives. We are resolved to repent sincerely and at once. And if there is any one who is not of that mind, we are quite satisfied that Thou shouldst expel him from our midst as a rebel against Thy authority, lest many innocent souls should have to suffer with and on account of him. As for the rest of us, we are firmly determined to change our lives for the better, to be more zealous in Thy service than we have been hitherto, and not to cease humbly and confidently imploring Thy mercy by public prayer, until Thou art fully appeased and sheathest the sword of vengeance Thou hast drawn to threaten us with; and so we shall show before the whole world that Thou art the Lord our Healer, our true God, who alone canst remedy our evils. Amen.

SEVENTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON PRAYER AND PENANCE IN THE DANGERS OF WAR.

Subject.

How one can prevent and avert a war.—*Preached in the year 1733.*

Text.

Si acuero ut fulgur gladium meum, reddam ultionem hostibus.—Deut. xxxii. 41.

“If I shall whet my sword as the lightning, I will render vengeance to My enemies.”

Introduction.

The angry God whets His sword like the lightning, whereby He gives us to understand that, as the lightning is the forerunner of the thunderbolt, and a warning to take care lest the latter should strike us, so also His sword of vengeance is a threat of future punishment, and at the same time a gracious warning that we must be on our guard. I explained all this last winter, when there was just as gloomy an out-look as at present. The avenging sword of God has flashed very often of late in our horizon, my dear brethren; it has threatened bad seasons, accompanied by scarcity and famine, as a consequence of the constant rains; it has threatened a general war throughout Europe; and

after that, again, another famine, on account of the drought. In the course of this year it threatened us with dangerous epidemics, and partially carried out the threat; not long ago it threatened us by more than one earthquake; what those latter forebode, we know not yet. Yet thanks be to the good God! up to the present He has not gone beyond threats, and we have not suffered so severely as we had reason to fear at first. But, is there not cause to fear that after all this lightning the thunderbolt must fall at last? Shall we not fear lest the almighty God may carry out His threats? Yes, indeed; for if we have ever had cause for apprehension, we have it now. The flames of war are kindled in our very neighborhood; the greatest potentates of Europe are busy making preparations for the impending, and, as many think, unavoidable struggle. Alas, poor city and land of Treves, how will you fare! You are generally the first object of the enemy's attack! Nor need I say much on this topic; for a sad experience has taught you what fearful moral and material ruin war can cause. The poorer classes of citizens and peasants have still to suffer from the effects of it, in their efforts to pay the debts incurred by war. Thanks be to God, we have a short period of rest. But what will become of us now? "O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere Thou be quiet?"¹ we might exclaim with the Prophet Jeremias; how long wilt Thou plague us? Is it Thy intention to destroy us utterly? No, my dear brethren, such is not the design of our good God; He is only brandishing His sword by way of threat. And for what purpose? That He may not have to smite us with His thunderbolt. He threatens that He may not be compelled to punish, says St. John Chrysostom. But what do those fearful threats signify? That it is the will of God that we do our best to avert and escape the thunderbolt, the dangers of war.

Plan of Discourse.

How we are to prevent and avert those dangers will be the whole subject of this exhortation. Meanwhile we cry out with one voice to Thee: "grant, O Lord, peace in our days, for there is none to fight for us or to protect us, but Thou, our God."

Help us by thy intercession, O powerful Queen of the heavenly hosts, that we may be heard by thy Son! and we make the same request of you, holy angels of peace. Amen.

¹ O mucro Domini, usque quo non quiesces?—Jerem. xlvii. 6.

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Of ourselves
we cannot
prevent war
or resist
the enemy.

But is it, then, possible for us to drive back the thunderbolt that is ready to fall on us, to extinguish the already kindled flames of war, and to repel the enemy from our city and fatherland? Poor people that we are! how could we do that? For we are in the same condition as the Israelites when they were at war with the Philistines, as we read in the First Book of Kings: "Now there was no smith to be found in all the land of Israel; for the Philistines had taken this precaution, lest the Hebrews should make them swords or spears," to protect and defend themselves. "And when the day of battle was come, there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people."¹ We might say the same of ourselves. We have neither arms nor strength to resist the attacks of our enemies, and to drive them from our country. Ah, we may well talk of averting the evils of war! It is far more likely that we shall have to make a virtue of necessity, and go out humbly to meet the enemy at his approach, offer him the keys of the city gates without waiting to be asked for them, as we have had to do before, and subscribe submissively to any tribute he wishes to impose on our property, no matter how hard it may seem to us, if we wish to escape the horrors of a general sacking and plundering.

But we can
do so if we
conquer
God by fast-
ing and
prayer.

But, my dear brethren, we have other means at our disposal, which we can and should make use of to resist, not the approaching enemy, but Him who has in His hand the hearts of all potentates. "The Lord of hosts is His name,"² as the Prophet Isaiah says; He has no difficulty in changing the hearts and dispositions of kings and nations who are contending with each other, and in changing them when and how He pleases, so that the threatened war may be averted; or else it is easy for him to give the war another direction and to turn it away from us. This, I say, is the God whom we must conquer, so as to induce Him to sheathe the sword of vengeance, or to turn it elsewhere. And what weapons must we use? Public prayer and fasting, the weapons we have commenced to use already? Yes, these are arms that are most powerful with the Almighty; for our united prayers, as Tertullian says, offer violence, as it were, to Him, so that He cannot withstand us; yet He wishes that we should gain such a victory over Him. It was in that way that the Ninivites forced Him to recall the sentence He had pronounced against

¹ Porro faber ferrarius non inveniebatur in omni terra Israel; caverant enim Philisthim, ne forte facerent Hebræi gladium aut lanceam. Cumque venisset dies prælii, non est inventus ensis et lancea in manu totius populi.—I. Kings xlii. 19, 22.

² Dominus exercituum nomen illius.—Isa. xlvii. 4.

them, that He would destroy them in forty days. In the same way Moses compelled the Almighty to restrain His anger against the Israelites, and not to inflict punishment on them as He had determined. And in that way, too, the Prophet Jeremias forced the Lord to speak him fair, as it were, that He might be able to carry out His designs: "Do not thou pray for this people, nor take to thee praise and supplication for them, and do not withstand Me."¹

But mark, my dear brethren, that Jeremias was just, Moses holy, and the Nimivites of contrite and humble hearts. Oh, if we too had such dispositions with our fasting and prayer, we could be assured of a victory over the divine anger, and could have a firm confidence that neither war nor any of the evils that spring from it would harm us. But I am afraid it will be with us as with the emperor Phocas in Constantinople. Never, according to Baronius, had greater preparations been made in that city to resist the approaching enemy than in the time of that emperor; and yet a voice was heard crying from heaven, "O emperor! thou art building walls, but if thou wert to raise them up to heaven, the city would still easily be captured, for its greatest enemy is within its walls."² Christians, we are now engaged in building walls even up to heaven, while we cry to the throne of God with prayer and fasting to protect our country from the miseries of war; but how will those walls be able to defend us, if our worst and greatest enemy, whom we have most to fear, is hidden in our very midst, in our city and land?

But that will not help while we have domestic foes to contend against.

What enemy is that? The one by which the town of Jericho was destroyed in the time of Josue; the people of Israel, who were besieging that town, did nothing but walk round its walls in silence: "But the seventh day, rising up early, they went about the city, as it was ordered, seven times. Josue said to all Israel: Shout. So all the people making a shout, and the trumpets sounding, when the voice and the sound thundered in the ears of the multitude, the walls forthwith fell down, and every man went up by the place that was over against him, and they took the city."³ But, asks St. Augustine, how did they

That is, as long as sins and vices are not abolished.

¹ Noli orare pro populo hoc, nec assumes pro eis laudem et orationem, et non obsistas mihi.—Jerem. vii. 16.

² O imperator! erigis muros; tametsi vel ad cœlos eos deducas, intus cum sit malum, urbs captu facilis est.—Baronius ad an. 964.

³ Die autem septimo, diluculo consurgentes, circumierunt urbem, sicut dispositum erat septies. Dixit Josue ad omnem Israel: vociferamini. Igitur omni populo vociferante, et clangentibus tubis, postquam in aures multitudinis vox sonitusque increpuit, muri illico corruerunt, et ascendit unusquisque per locum qui contra se erat, cederantque civitatem.—Jos. vi. 15, 16, 20.

manage that, as they used no violence against the city. Although, he answers, they did not attack it by force, "yet the walls were thrown down from the outside by the voices of the just, and from the inside by the sins of the inhabitants."¹ The same thing could easily happen to us; the sins and vices of the inhabitants of the city and land of Treves are the dangerous domestic foes that render useless the walls of fasting and prayer that have been raised to heaven. But I have often spoken of this already, so that I need say no more about it. We all acknowledge with St. Ambrose that "a general calamity is never inflicted on a whole community unless on account of the sins of the inhabitants."² It is not chance nor the malice of men that is to be blamed, for the evil comes from the just decree of God, "on account of the sins of the inhabitants."

Meanwhile
no one
blames him-
self for the
war.

We all, I say, acknowledge the truth of this; but if one were to examine each of us individually on the subject, he would hardly find one to acknowledge that he is to blame. We resemble in this respect people attacked with vertigo; they think that the house is going round, although it is not the house but their own heads that are disturbed. We are infected with that malady in a high degree. If you ask what is the cause of the evils that menace you, what are the sins on account of which they are inflicted, the common people will say that the pride, injustice, avarice of the rich are to blame; while the rich will throw the whole fault on the vicious lives of the common people. Thus, as one puts the blame on the other, neither makes any effort to amend, and the enemy still remains in our midst. But, my dear brethren, that will not do; the axe must be laid to the root of the tree; we must get rid of that vertigo! Let each one enter into his own conscience, and see what secret sins defile it; then let him acknowledge with a contrite and humble heart that he is to blame for the general misfortune; let him say, it is on my account that God chastises this land, therefore I must do penance, and be reconciled to God, and sincerely amend my life. Then let us see whether we have not, perhaps, a share in those public vices which are the principal cause of the public calamities that God sends down on a community; those vices which have almost become fashionable in the world. They are described by St. John in his First Epistle: "All that is in the

¹ Expugnabantur tamen forinsecus sono justorum, intrinsecus tabernaculo peccatorum.—S. Aug. serm. 160. de temp.

² Civitati nonnisi propter civium peccata inferitur excidium.—S. Ambr. serm. 85.

world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life." ¹

O holy city of Treves! put that vertigo out of your head for a moment! Are you not infected with those vices like the rest of the world? Pride of life, where art thou? We have not need of a long search to find thee. We cannot judge of the interior pride of the heart, because we cannot see it; but if what the Holy Ghost says by the wise Ecclesiasticus be true (and it would be a sin against faith to doubt it), namely, that the outward man is an index of the inner—"A man is known by his look, and a wise man, when thou meetest him, is known by his countenance. The attire of the body, and the laughter of the teeth, and the gait of the man show what he is;" ²—if that is the case, what an alarming share of the pride of life is ours! For when people show such signs of dissoluteness and haughtiness in their dress and outward appearance, what can one think of their hearts? And how do people appear in public nowadays? When the city of Florence was in the greatest danger of an inundation, Simon Cassia cried out: "Wake up, O Florence! Correct the wicked vanity of your women; for unless you do, those present evils will be but the forerunners of more grievous ones." ³ If I might speak my mind, my dear brethren, I would change but one word in that whole sentence, and say, "wake up, Treves," and apply all the rest of it to ourselves.

In truth, it is lamentable to see how in a Christian city, that boasts of the name of holy, the frivolous fashions of the rest of the world in the matter of dress are followed, so that many occasions of sin and scandal are offered to chaste eyes and hearts, while the common people find therein an occasion of sinful and contumelious language and of cursing and swearing. And yet they who are tricked out in that shameful fashion come to the tribunal of Jesus Christ to confess their sins, and appear at the table of the Lord to receive holy Communion, where their outward demeanor should evince nothing but modesty and humility; nay, in the very temple of God their dress, by its indecency, is an occasion of sin, as experience shows. And when days of public prayer and penance are appointed, to avert public calamity, they come with the rest of the people to appease the wrath of

Although many share in public vices, such as pride and vanity in dress.

Especially they who conform to the modern fashions.

¹ Omne quod est in mundo, concupiscentia carnis est, et concupiscentia oculorum, et superbia vitæ.—I. John ii. 16.

² Ex visu cognoscitur vir, et ab occurso faciei cognoscitur sensatus. Amictus corporis, et risus dentium, et ingressus hominis enuntiant de illo.—Eccles. xix. 26, 27.

³ Corrige tuarum foeminarum improbam vanitatem! Quia nisi debite corrigaris, hæc damna quæ pateris tibi dico initia esse pejorum.—Cassia. Ep. I. in Flor.

God, but they do not moderate the extravagance of their dress. How inconsistent such conduct! How can you dare to exhibit yourselves in public dressed up in that way, in such circumstances? Such was the question that St. John Chrysostom asked the women of his time, although the only extravagance they were guilty of consisted in the pearls and gold ornaments they wore, which are not apt to cause unchaste thoughts. "How," he says, "can one who is thus adorned send up her sighs and prayers to God?"¹ If you who are thus dressed out were to shed tears, the people would laugh at you. They would say that such tears are only a sign of hypocrisy. While you weep, and sigh, and pray with the others to appease the wrath of God, your scandalous style of dress brings down the divine anger on you and others as well. So far St. Chrysostom. Is it surprising that such fashions should provoke the Almighty, to whom pride is especially hateful, to inflict a general punishment on the whole community? For He assures us that He resists the proud, but gives His grace to the humble.

Which are
contrary to
the Gospel.

I do not wish to say anything now as to whether a sin is committed by those who follow such fashions, and what sort of a sin it is; nor to allude to the opinions of theologians on the matter. I will grant even that there is no sin in it. But what of that? There is not the least doubt that it would be more in accordance with Christian humility to do away with that fashion altogether, and, as Our Lord Himself says, without humility we cannot enter heaven. And it would be more in accordance with the life and example of Christ, whom we must all try to imitate, and whom our heavenly Father has proposed as a pattern for all, for, as St. Paul says, those whom God has predestined for heaven, He has also foreseen, that they are to be conformable to the image of His Son; more in accordance with the teaching of the Gospel, which inculcates nothing more impressively than true humility and mortification, self-denial, detachment from all pomp and vain shows, contempt of the world and its usages, the rough way of penance, which alone leads to heaven, the violence we must use in order to enter by the narrow gate, etc; more in accordance with the teaching of the apostles, and especially of St. Paul (read, I pray you, the second chapter of his First Epistle to Timothy, and there you will find how he instructs Christian women as to the style of dress that they should

¹ Quo pacto ingemiscere potest, et ut decet orare, quæ hujusmodi ornatu compta procedis?

adopt; you will find that he does not even allow them to curl their hair, nor to use ornaments of gold, or precious stones, although such things are not in themselves scandalous, but he forbids them because they are superfluous and vain); more in accordance with the teaching of the holy Fathers, who were specially enlightened by the Holy Ghost, that they might make known to us the will of God (I tremble when I read how Tertullian, St. Cyprian, St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Gregory of Nazianzen, St. Jerome, St. John Chrysostom, and many others speak of extravagance in dress, although it may not be indecent; they seem to look on it as a most astonishing thing for a Christian to be seen tricked out in such a manner. I tremble when I read the commentators of the Holy Scripture, especially Angelo Pacciuchelli on the Prophet Jonas, and Cornelius à Lapide on the Prophet Isaias, and see how they describe extravagance in dress as most hateful in the sight of God, and how they bring forward examples from Scripture to show that God has often punished it with severe public calamities); more in accordance with the life and example of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of all the saints of God, amongst whom were princesses and queens, who were distinguished by their modest and humble clothing of simple woolen stuffs.

Now I leave any sensible person to judge whether preachers do not perform a good work, according to their duty and for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, when they endeavor with Christ their Head, the holy apostles, the holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church, to exhort people to follow the narrow way which alone leads to heaven, and urge them to imitate the example of our most humble Saviour, of the Blessed Virgin, and of all the saints of God? And if the women wish to keep the solemn promise they made in baptism, by which they bound themselves to renounce all the pomps and vanities of the world, I leave them to judge whether they should not obey the well-meant exhortation of preachers, and say to themselves: I will try, then, to follow the example of my Saviour and His teaching in the Gospel, the example of the holy Mother of God and of all the saints, and to enter on the narrow way that leads to heaven, for that becomes me as a penitent in this vale of tears, in this place of penance; and therefore I will give up this extravagant style of dress, which does not at all harmonize with my profession, whether it is sinful or not; and I will do that in order to please God all the more, and to place my soul in greater security. And much

So that no
one should
follow
them.

greater are the reasons for my carrying out this resolution, when the dress I wear, according to the prevailing fashion, is indecent and an occasion of sin, and as such is in direct opposition to the teaching of the Gospel and of the holy Fathers of the Church.

Neverthe-
less, those
fashions
are still
followed.

But there is not much use in talking of this matter; and if I were not obliged by my duty to reprehend public abuses, I should not waste my time in speaking of it. With reason does St. Bernardine of Siena say: "If an angel, or St. Paul, or even Our Lord Himself were to come down from heaven and to preach against that fashion, I do not think he would effect any improvement."¹ If an angel came down from heaven, if the great Apostle of the gentiles were to ascend the pulpit and instruct Christian women as to how they should dress modestly and in a manner becoming them; nay, perhaps if Christ Himself came and condemned those fashions, saying that whoever wishes to enter heaven must follow the rude path of penance, and learn from Him to be meek and humble of heart, I do not believe that even such eloquent preachers would be able to produce any lasting amendment. For an appeal would be made against their exhortations to the general custom, while no one would pay the least attention to the will of God in such a matter; the law of Jesus Christ must give way before the law of the world, and though people protest that they are ready to do all that God wishes, yet they are not willing to act in opposition to what they see others doing.

Which is
very wrong.

Well, for my part, you can go on with what you are not willing to give up for God's sake, for your own souls, and for the souls of others! For my part, I say; because I have neither profit nor loss for my soul from your abominable fashions, except that, on the one hand, you give me reason for more careful mortification of the eyes, and on the other, I am exceedingly sorry, not because, as I have been told, there are some who, to spite preachers, carry the fashion to the extremity of indecency—for I trouble myself little about their ridicule, and I agree with the beautiful words of St. Ambrose: "You wrong no one by preferring God to all, and by not being afraid to say, with confidence in Him, what you believe to be to His glory"²—but I am heartily sorry and could shed bitter tears when I consider that the

¹ Si angelus, vel Paulus, forte vel Christus de cœlo descenderet, et contra hæc talia vestimenta prædicarent; credo quod victoriam non haberent.

² Nemini facies injuriam, si omnibus Deum præfers, et confidens in ipsum, non vereris dicere ad ejus gloriam quod sentis.

good God, who showers so many benefits daily on His creatures, cannot induce them to give up such a wretched thing for His sake; that Jesus Christ must look on patiently while the souls that He has bought at the cost of so much ignominy and torture are determined to act in public defiance of His humility and His Gospel, and I must sigh with St. Bernard: "Thy swaddling clothes," in which Thou wert wrapped in the manger, "are placed as a sign, O Lord, but as a sign which many contradict even nowadays!"¹ The poor garment that grew up with Thee, and which Thou hast left to our archdiocese of Treves, by Thy servant St. Helena, as a pledge of Thy love, and which is still humbly venerated by all; the ragged purple mantle in which Thou wert ridiculed as a mock king: all this is placed as a sign, which many Christians contradict in our days. I am heartily sorry when I consider that the holy guardian angels have to look on while their charges give occasion to many impure thoughts and desires by their indecent dress; that the great Monarch of heaven cannot obtain from His adopted children, by the promise of heaven or the threat of hell, what any temporal prince could effect at once by a simple expression of His wish. When St. John Capistran was preaching at Ratisbon against gambling and extravagance in dress, although the latter was not near so bad as it now is, the gamblers came after the sermon with their cards and dice, and the women with their superfluous ornaments, to the public square, where they made a large bonfire, and burnt all those vanities to ashes, as we read in the Life of that Saint. And the same God, who still speaks by the mouths of His preachers, cannot with all His inspirations and exhortations induce people to give up scandalous vanities! Ah, the Patriarch Abraham received but a sign from God, and in obedience to it he was ready to sacrifice his only son without the least hesitation, while we cannot make up our minds to renounce a disgusting fashion for His sake and for the furtherance of His honor and glory! And yet we pretend to be pious, and say daily: Lord, Thy will be done! And we profess to be resigned to every decree of divine Providence, and we often say with a sigh that we do very little good! Nonsense! Such devotion as that is only fit to be laughed at. If you wish to do the will of God in reality, you have a splendid opportunity. All this, I say, makes me very sorry. But I cannot help it; go on in your own way, and make the customary excuse, "if others

¹ In signum positi sunt panni tui, Domine Jesu! sed in signum cui a multis usque hodie contradicetur!

give up the fashion, I will do so, too; but not otherwise." But you might add, for it comes to the same thing: if others make up their minds to walk on the narrow way that leads to heaven, I will do so, too; otherwise I will continue on the broad road that leads to hell.

God is thus
forced to
punish the
world.

What means, then, is left to put a stop to this fashion? None, answers St. Bernardine of Siena, as experience in many towns has taught me, "but the chastising rod of the Almighty;"¹ and would to God that that rod did not strike the innocent as well! When the Israelites fell into the horrible crime of idolatry, and adored the golden calf, God determined to destroy them, but He was appeased by Moses. Hear what the Lord said, however: Go, said He, and say to the people: "Now presently lay aside the ornaments, that I may know what to do to thee:" then I will see what course I shall pursue with regard to you. "So the children of Israel laid away their ornaments from Mount Horeb."² Mark, my dear brethren, how the Lord seems unable to pardon them as long as they were extravagantly dressed. Now, if such attire was so hateful to God in the Old Law, what must it be in the New? Such is the argument of Cornelius à Lapide in his commentary on the Prophet Isaias. If excessive luxury in dress on the part of the women was so displeasing to God that He often decreed to destroy the people on account of it, how displeasing must it not be to Him, and how must He not be resolved to punish it severely in Christians?"³ In Christians, who are bound to follow a humble Saviour? In Christians, who have solemnly undertaken in baptism to renounce the devil, the flesh, the world, and its pomps and vanities? Ask the pious John Tauler what was the origin of the calamities and especially of the wars and heresies that, as he foresaw sixty years beforehand, would come upon Germany? Here is his answer: "The signs and omens that announce such fearful calamities are certainly the slashed dresses, the new fashions, and those modes of attire which are provocative of lust." You will find more to the same purpose in the Revelations of St. Bridget. If the scourges with which God has threatened our land are to be averted, a blessing which we daily implore from heaven with united voices, although it is hard to say as yet whether we shall obtain it or not, yet you

¹ Nisi Dei flagellum.

² Jam nunc depone ornatum tuum, ut sciam quid faciam tibi. Deposuerunt ergo filii Israel ornatum suum a monte Horeb.—Exod. xxxiii. 5, 6.

³ Quomodo jam displicebit et punietur in Christianis?

must know that the Almighty has still other scourges in His hands with which He can chastise you individually, and He has often used them, sending to some ulcerous sores that ate away their mouths and noses in punishment of their vanity in painting their faces, while others were afflicted by hideous cancers, as a chastisement for wearing low-necked dresses. With regard to the hooped costumes now in vogue, I have been lately told by one of our Fathers that in a certain town from which he had just come a person of the upper classes, who used to follow that fashion, was possessed by the devil; and when the evil spirit was adjured to tell how he got that person into his power, he answered that God had delivered her over to him in punishment for wearing such a dress. This fact I recommend to the notice of those who laugh at people for giving up such dresses for conscientious motives, and turn their piety into ridicule. St. Jerome writes of Praetextata, a noble lady, that an angel announced to her that she would be damned because she helped to deck out the maiden Eustochium. "After five months," said the angel, "you will be carried down to hell, because you adorned that young woman after the fashion of the world." Let parents take notice of this when they compel their daughters to follow the fashions, although the latter would prefer to dress in a manner more suitable to Christian modesty. I certainly do not wish that you should feel the chastising hand of God; but you may be assured that, if you escape all temporal punishments, whether in the shape of general calamities or individual chastisements, the words of Jesus Christ will surely be fulfilled in you, "Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh." Consider therefore well what you are doing.

But I am afraid that I have spent too long speaking of this matter, so that I have only a short time to devote to the consideration of the other causes of public chastisements. From pride and vanity in dress generally follows that other capital sin, the concupiscence of the eyes, or avarice. For, the pride that drives many to expense in dress that their income hardly allows is the cause of parents leaving their children unprovided for at their death, and bequeathing to them, as their only legacy, expensive habits, which ill suit their means, and which are, nevertheless, difficult to get rid of; from which it follows that money is sought for and made in very doubtful ways. And hence, too,

Other causes of punishment are avarice and injustice.

¹ Finito mense quinto, ad inferna deduceris, quia mundano more puellam ornasti.—S. Hieron. ep. iv. ad Lactan.

it happens that many are unable to help the poor, for all they have to spare goes in dress, as St. John Chrysostom observes: "Christ goes about tattered and naked, and deprived of the necessary food."¹ There is a sin that will condemn you.

**The desires
of the flesh.**

And what am I to say of the third deadly sin, the concupiscence of the flesh? O city of Treves! put the vertigo out of your head! Have you not a share in that, too? Ah, damnable idleness, useless visiting, dangerous gatherings, meetings of young people of both sexes, gluttony and drunkenness, constant disunion between married people! what other fruits can you bear, but the corruption of the young, impurity amongst the unmarried, secret adultery amongst the married, sometimes even incest and sacrilege! I dare not say all that might be said on this subject, lest I should offend chaste ears. Let every one who is guilty in this respect consider the state in which he is, and let him not forget that this is the vice which often called down fire from heaven that burnt whole cities to ashes, that it often caused the earth to open and swallow up cities and their inhabitants, and that it brought the universal deluge on the world.

**Un-Christian
training
of children.**

If time permitted I might speak of another great vice, namely, the wicked, dissolute, and un-Christian training that many parents give their children. We see proofs of it in the streets, where boys and girls run about the whole day without the least restraint; at the doors and windows of the houses, where they stand gaping and staring for hours at a time; in the vanities in which the children must be trained when their mothers are too old to practise them themselves. Besides that, there is that abominable habit of cursing, in which parents indulge against their children, and even children against their parents; for, where there is no good training and correction, there can be no respect for parental authority. And it is the custom, moreover, for parents to send their daughters into foreign lands, and that, too, into lands where they soon lose all sense of modesty, and from which they bring back a good share of the insolence and vanity of the world. Thus parents force their children, whose immortal souls are entrusted to their care, on to the broad road of eternal damnation. But I have often explained this to you already, for I have spent half a year treating of it. Would to God that there was any chance of amendment in this respect!

**If these
vices are not
abolished,**

But if these and similar vices are not corrected, it is in vain that we raise high walls to heaven in order to avert the dangers of

¹ Christus nudus obambulat, necessario alimento destitutus.

war; all our fasting and prayers will be useless, and we have just reason for fearing that after all this threatening on the part of God the thunderbolt will at last strike us, and we shall learn by sad experience how the Lord can avenge Himself on His enemies. "Except you will be converted," says the Prophet David, "He will brandish His sword," and that not merely to threaten you; "He hath bent His bow and made it ready." And in it He hath prepared the instruments of death; "He hath made ready His arrows for them that burn."¹

our prayers
are useless.

Oh, no, dear Lord, let it not be so with us! O sword of the Lord, we say in the words of the Prophet Jeremias, "How long will it be ere thou be quiet?" How long wilt thou fill us with fear and anxiety? "Go into thy scabbard, rest and be still."² If Thou wilt that we should do penance and amend our lives in order to induce Thee to be still, behold us now prostrate at Thy feet, full of contrition for our sins, and ready to submit to Thy will in all things, without further opposition. "Go into Thy scabbard," then, "rest and be still." Grant, O Lord, peace in our days to this city and country, so that we may be able to serve Thee in peace and quiet, and to thank Thee our whole lives long most humbly, openly acknowledging before the world that Thou art the Lord who, being angry with us, didst not, however, forget Thy mercy. Amen.

Conclusion
and resolution
of
amend-
ment.

SEVENTY-THIRD SERMON.

HUMBLE ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT WE WELL DESERVE THE PUNISHMENT WE NOW SUFFER FROM THE CONSTANT AND INJURIOUS RAINS.

Subject.

Prayer and acknowledgment that God is just in punishing us.
—*Preached in the year 1737, during a time of public prayer.*

Text.

Justus es, Domine, et omnia judicia tua justa sunt.—Tob. iii. 2.

"Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgments are just."

¹ Nisi conversi fueritis gladium suum vibrabit; arcum suum tetendit, et paravit illum; sagittas suas ardentibus efficit.—Ps. vii. 13, 14.

² Usquequo non quiesces? Ingredere in vaginam tuam, refrigerare, et sile.—Jer. xlvii. 6.

Introduction and Plan of Discourse.

Christians who are here present to-day, I do not now look on you as hearers to whom I have to speak; I will not preach a sermon to day; for our preaching seems only to make matters worse and to render sinners more obstinate and perverse. I only ask of you now to act the part of humble suppliants, and to unite with me in sending up to heaven, to the God who is so angry with us, a short prayer, since time does not permit a longer one.

We are now
in troublous
times.

“Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgments are just.” After the evils of war with which Thou hast afflicted us in past years, evils which the innocent and the poor have, in accordance with Thy just decrees, felt more keenly than those who deserved to feel them, after so many occasions of fearful sins were taken away by the restoration of the longed-for peace, we might have expected from Thy goodness and mercy better and more prosperous times! And, indeed, O Lord, Thou hast meant well towards us, as we must confess. Thou hast shown us in this present year how Thou art able to bless us with abundance in our fields, orchards, and vineyards; but Thou hast only allowed the mere appearance of prosperity to gladden us for a moment, in order to let us see how generous Thou couldst and wouldst be to us even in temporal things; and every one was rejoiced at the fine prospect. But now the almost incessant rains have nearly ruined our hopes; the grapes in our vineyards commence to rot away, or cannot attain to maturity; the crops in our fields, whether they are still standing or have been cut down, are seriously injured; the poor peasants are in a most wretched state, and, as I have seen myself a short time ago, are trying to still their hunger with corn dried on their stoves, since they have no more bread; while the future threatens to be still worse for them.

It is easy for
God to help
us.

But how is that, O Lord? (Forgive me if I, a miserable worm of the earth, presume to question Thy inscrutable decrees!) Art Thou not Lord over all the waters? Art Thou not the “Lord upon many waters,”¹ as Thy servant David says? Art Thou not He, “who made a weight for the winds, and weighed the waters by measure? who gave a law to the rains and fixed the number of every drop, when He gave a law for the rain, and a way for the sounding storm?”² Art Thou not He who has put bounds to the raging sea, the rushing torrents, and the mighty rivers, within

¹ Dominus super aquas multas.—Ps. xxviii. 3.

² Qui fecit ventis pondus, et aquas appendit in mensura; quando ponebat pluviis legem, et viam procellis sonantibus.—Job. xxviii. 25, 26.

which they must contain themselves, unless Thou commandest them to burst their barriers, as Thou Thyself sayest: "I set My bounds around it, and make it a bar and doors; and I said, hither-to thou shalt come, and shalt go no further, and here thou shalt break thy swelling waves"?¹ Art Thou not He who, when Thou pleasest, canst bless us with a fertilizing rain, sifting the clouds as it were, and causing them to send their drops down on the earth according to our wants, "Dropping water out of the clouds of the heavens"?² But when Thou wishest to punish us, Thou makest the clouds to pour down torrents, as Thou hast threatened to do by Thy Prophet Ezechiel: "There shall be an overflowing shower, and I will cause great hailstones to fall violently from above, and a stormy wind to throw it down."³ Art Thou not the same Lord still? And canst Thou not, therefore, shut up the waters in the heavens, and place a barrier to them on earth, that they may be restrained within their boundaries?

Thou hast often done that at the prayer of Thy pious servants. When in former times, the river Po overflowed its banks and threatened to sweep all before it, the holy Bishop of Piacenza, Savinus, wrote a letter and sent it by a priest to the proud river, commanding it in the name of Jesus Christ not to leave its bed any more.⁴ When the priest had read the letter in the presence of a vast concourse of people, he threw it into the swollen waters, and immediately they subsided, and returned to their former channel.⁵ On the occasion of that terrible inundation of the sea which took place on the death of the apostate emperor Julian, when the waters rose so high that they seemed to threaten the world with a deluge, as St. Jerome writes, Thy servant Hilarion cried out to Thee, made the sign of the cross three times over the waters, and boldly advancing against the swelling waves, commanded them not to come any further; they instantly obeyed, and remained fixed where they were, although the succeeding billows kept pressing on them, until they formed towers and walls on the top of each other. "Incredible to relate," says St. Jerome, "to what an immense height the waves

As we know
from history.

¹ Circumdedi illud terminis meis, et posui vectem et ostia, et dixi: usque huc venies, et non procedes amplius, et hic confringes tumentes fluctus tuos.—Job xxxviii. 10, 11.

² Cribans aquas de nubibus cœlorum.—II. Kings xxii. 12.

³ Erit enim imber inundans, et dabo lapides prægrandes desuper irruentes, et ventum procellæ dissipantem.—Ezech. xlii. 11.

⁴ Præcipio tibi in nomine Jesu Christi, ut de alveo tuo in locis istis ulterius non ex eas.—Bezerlinck, theat. v., mirac.

⁵ Et mox inundatio cessavit.

rose before him.”¹ For a long time it seemed to rage and foam against the violent restraint placed on it; but at last it subsided, humbled itself before its holy conqueror, and retreated.² Thou art not now in need of working such miracles, O Lord! Give but a sign to the clouds, and they will at once restrain their torrents, while the sky, that to our great detriment has hitherto been so overcast, will become clear again, and the gladsome sun will refresh the earth, which has been almost stifled beneath the weight of waters.

We pray to
Him and
He does not
hear us.

And why dost Thou not do so? Wilt Thou not hear our mournful prayers and cries? Dost Thou not see the many processions, or hear the piteous supplications that are offered to Thee by the poor villagers, who flock to the churches and cry aloud to Thee for mercy and grace? Thou art a just and at the same time an infinitely good God! Why, then, wilt Thou not hear us? Thou art a faithful God, who canst not deceive us; where, then, is the fulfilment of Thy oft-repeated promise, “Ask and you shall receive. Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you”?³ These and many similar promises Thou hast made in favor of him who flies to Thee for refuge and pours out his soul in Thy sight. How much more, then, does not that promise avail for a whole community, a whole country, which calls to Thee in its necessities, in public devotions appointed for that express purpose. Thou hast spoken plainly enough of the efficacy of such prayers in the Gospel of St. Matthew: “Again I say to you that if two of you shall consent upon earth concerning whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by My Father who is in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.”⁴ Behold, nearly all the people of the land are now gathered together in that way and are united in prayer. On a former occasion, after such a prayer, Thou didst command Thy angels: “Go, ye swift angels, to a nation rent and torn in pieces; to a nation expecting and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled.”⁵ Give the same

¹ Incredible dictu est, in quam altitudinem intumescens mare ante eum steterit.—S. Hieron. in Vita S. Hilarton.

² Diu fremens, et quasi ad obicem indignans, paulatim in semetipsum relapsus subsidit.

³ Amen, amen, dico vobis, si quid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, dabit vobis.—John xvi. 23.

⁴ Iterum dico vobis, quia si duo ex vobis consenserint super terram, de omni re quamcunque petierint, fiet illis a Patre meo qui in cœlis est. Ubi enim sunt duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum in medio eorum.—Matt. xviii. 19-20.

⁵ Ite angeli veloces ad gentem convulsam et dilaceratam . . . ad gentem expectantem et conculentam, cujus diripuerunt flumina terram ejus.—Isa. xviii. 2.

command now, since we send up our united petitions to Thee, expecting help and consolation from Thee in our extremity! But Thou dost not hear us.

Yet why do I complain? “Thou art just, O Lord!” And of a certainty Thou hearest more than we deserve. Thou gavest proof of that some months ago, when the priests, at the command of their ecclesiastical superior, recited in the Mass the Collect to avert public calamities; at once and for a long time after Thou didst grant us warm and favorable weather. And last week, after we had commenced to pray to Thee, the sky immediately cleared up and gave us hopes of a good harvest. But we were doomed to disappointment. And why, O Lord? for we still pray to Thee publicly in Thy churches, and implore Thy mercy. But I need not ask Thee, O Lord, for I know the reason already. One hand we stretch out asking for an alms, while with the other we reject the gifts of Thy goodness. We sigh, and pray, and sing to Thee, that Thou mayest restrain the heavy down-pour of rain, while we still leave open the spring from which all the misfortune flows. So it is. “Thou art just, O Lord!” The prayer we have commenced is good; but we do not amend our perverse ways, which are the cause of our tribulations; we do not repent of and avoid the sins and vices which have placed the scourge in Thy hands and compelled Thee to strike us still. We let those simple souls who mean well towards Thee pray to Thee in the churches; the poor and needy peasants may sigh and appeal to Thee in their misery, and beg for the necessities of life from Thee; but we trouble ourselves little about what they do. If we were even like the heathen people in Ninive, when they were merely threatened with destruction, if we were like the Jews in the time of Esther and Judith, when they were only in danger of misfortune, we should cover ourselves with coarse sack-cloth, put ashes on our heads, mortify our bodies with constant fasting, and detest our sins from our hearts, in order to avert the calamity that threatens us, as those people did in former times with success. If we were like the early Christians, we should under our present circumstances give up all pleasure-parties and social gatherings, and spend our time in the churches, imploring Thy mercy, as the Christians did in the reign of the younger Theodosius. When that emperor saw that the scarcity was increasing, owing to the excessive rains, he caused the trumpets to be sounded and proclamation to be made that the best thing to do was to give up going to thea-

And justly,
for we do
not amend
our lives.

tres and public spectacles, and instead of that to visit the churches, in order to beg for mercy.¹ And at his command the theatres were abandoned and the people flocked to the churches from all quarters, Theodosius himself appearing, clad in mean apparel, without any insignia of his rank, humbling himself amongst the citizens, and raising his hands and his voice, asking for help. When Thou sawest the people thus assembled, after having given up the theatre for the church, Thou didst at once hear their prayers; for they who had come to the church in a torrent of rain went home filled with consolation, the sun shining brightly in the heavens, while the fruitfulness that ensued changed the scarcity into the greatest plenty.² But how do we act now? We persist in our evil ways, and let things go on as they may, as if the misery of the poor were a matter of indifference to us!

God sees
secret vices
and open
dissipation.

But, O all-seeing God, I need not remind Thee of this. Everything is open before Thee; Thou knowest how things go in the world; Thou seest how men act before Thee in their hearts and in their outward behavior. Intolerable pride and inordinate vanity, impurity, gluttony, drunkenness, cursing and swearing, detraction and calumny, contempt for Thy word in sermons, un-Christain training of children, abominable idleness and dissipation—Thou knowest where and how all these vices prevail. Thou seest what sort of lives people lead, even now in these days of penance, when we should come together in Thy churches to implore Thy mercy with united prayers. Wert Thou not all-seeing, so that Thou shouldst have to learn by hearing, the very public streets and squares, the very stones of the houses would cry out to Thee and tell Thee what is done in them. Thou wouldst hear the unchaste songs that make night hideous, the wanton laughter, the never-ceasing din of music, the dancing and dissipation which turn night into day and day into night, and of which Thou hast so often complained by Thy prophets. Thou knowest, too, how many sins are committed in such circumstances in thoughts and desires, in talk and conversation, by looks and laughter, by touch and improper liberties, and how many sins will be committed afterwards in consequence of those dissipations. Nay,—and what a terrible thing to say of Thy Christians!—Thou wilt hear the vain boastings of some who live

¹ Conductibilis esse, spectaculo repudiato, Deum, qui præsentī calamitate eos liberaret precibus placare.—Nicephor. Hist. Eccles., l. xiv. c. 4.

² Statim cælum aërem turbidum serenitate commutavit, et frumentī non mediocrem inopiam ingens frugum copia et ubertas est consecuta.

in this town (they are foreigners; for I could not imagine any one belonging to Treves to be guilty of such wickedness) and who, as I have been told, openly assert that, as long as the public prayers continue, they will dance and amuse themselves.

O my Lord and my God, hast Thou ever experienced such conduct on the part of Turks and Saracens, when they were ordered to observe days of public prayer and penance in honor of their false prophet Mohammed, to avert impending calamities? Thou knowest that they, as a sign of humiliation and penance, tear their hair with shrieks and howls, beat their faces with their fists, and cut themselves with sharp knives. But in a city consecrated to Thee from ancient times, bedewed with the blood of countless martyrs, honored in a special manner with the title of holy, in the midst of troubles and calamities and in a time appointed for public prayer and penance, Thou must hear from Christians the words, "let others pray if they wish; we shall dance and amuse ourselves!" Whether what I have been told is true or not, Thou knowest, O Lord, if I do not! At all events, the conduct of some shows what their intentions are; for hardly a night passes without some party or other which disturbs the whole neighborhood. Christian parents send, or even bring with them to such parties their daughters; and when Thy pious servants are going to church in the early morning, to pray to Thee and to sing Thy praises, they are just returning from a dance and are about to go to bed, or else to appear in the church to spite others and let them see where they have spent the night. Nor is there any prospect of these dissipations soon coming to an end, for, as I have again been told, similar parties have been arranged for the next three or four nights, so as to fill up the number of the days of prayer. Thou, O Lord, knowest whether this is true or not! Perhaps, while we are here assembled in such large numbers to implore Thy mercy, there are others standing before their mirrors, tricking themselves out for a ball this evening.

But what is the meaning, O Lord, of such conduct? Do not those people seem to be triumphing publicly over the misfortunes of poor, oppressed citizens and peasants? Are they not acting in contempt of ecclesiastical superiors, who in Thy name have appointed those days as a time of penance and prayer? Do they not mock at and ridicule the public devotions and prayers of good Christians? Do they not openly defy Thee, O Lord, at the very moment when Thou art threatening to

Many grow worse instead of doing penance.

It is not to be wondered at if God were to punish us still more severely.

chastise us? "Thou art just, O Lord." Nor am I surprised that Thou dost not hear our prayers; for even little children have their answer ready when they are exhorted to pray fervently. "What is the good of praying," they say, "when those people of the town spend their nights in dancing." But I am surprised at the patience and meekness with which Thou, O Lord, lookest on! I am surprised that Thou art content with chastising us so gently, and that Thou hast not commanded the four elements to combine and destroy us!

And He
would do so
if He were
not re-
strained by
the prayers
of the pious.

But I know what restrains Thee. Thou art still the same long-suffering and merciful God who promised the Patriarch Abraham that, if even ten just men were to be found in the wicked city of Sodom, Thou wouldst spare it for their sake; and here Thou hast many of both sexes, nay, I venture to say, the greater part of the population as Thy pious and devout servants, who mean well with Thee, who are resigned to Thy holy will, and seek to appease Thy just anger by their united prayers. It is they who move Thee to pity and prevent Thee from visiting us as sharply as we deserve; it is they who, since Thy justice compels Thee to punish public abuses and scandals in some degree by public chastisements, feel perhaps more acutely than those for whose sins they are punished the calamities that are impending over us. "Thou art just, O Lord!" even in this decree of Thine; for Thou visitest Thy pious servants with misfortune, in order to try their patience, to increase their merit in heaven, and to make sinners more inexcusable before Thy judgment-seat, and their torments in hell more severe, because by their un-Christian mode of life they were the cause of suffering to the innocent. "Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgments are just."

Humble
adoration
of the jus-
tice of God.

What else have we then to do but to resign ourselves humbly to Thy fatherly decrees, and acknowledge our guilt in the words of the Prophet Daniel: "We have sinned; we have committed iniquity, O Lord, against all Thy justice. . . . We have done wickedly and have revolted; and we have gone aside from Thy commandments and Thy judgments. We have not hearkened to Thy servants, the prophets, that have spoken in Thy name."¹ We have laughed at Thy word in which Thou hast warned us and exhorted us to amend our lives as at an idle threat; we have

¹ Peccavimus, iniquitatem fecimus, Domine, in omnem justitiam tuam. . . . Imple egimus, et recessimus, et declinavimus a mandatis tuis ac iudiciis. Non obedivimus servis tuis, prophetis, qui locuti sunt in nomine tuo.—Dan. ix. 15, 16, 5, 6.

only become more obstinate, and have said, “now we will show the preacher that we do not mind him.” And now Thou art about to afflict us with calamities; and Thou hast good reason for doing that, for Thou art just, O Lord; we have deserved it a thousand times. “To Thee, O Lord, justice, but to us confusion of face.”¹

But after this humble acknowledgment we venture to persevere in our prayers to Thee: “Incline, O my God, Thy ear, and hear; open Thy eyes and see our desolation, and the city upon which Thy name is called; for it is not for our justifications that we present our prayers before Thy face, but for the multitude of Thy tender mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord be appeased; hearken and do; delay not for Thy own sake, O my God; because Thy name is invoked upon Thy city and upon Thy people;”² for Thy holy name is invoked upon this city and upon Thy people by many pious souls who mean well towards Thee! We beg and implore Thy mercy for those who still continue to provoke Thy anger by their sinful lives, that Thou, as the almighty Ruler, mayest bring them to see the error of their ways, to repent and amend their un-Christian mode of life, so that, being fully appeased, Thou mayest send us what Thou knowest to be the best for our souls. To this end we will now begin, if not with united voices, at least with united and contrite hearts, to sing and sigh to Thee: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.” Amen.

Appeal to
His mercy.

SEVENTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON TRUSTFUL PRAYER IN APPARENTLY DESPERATE CIRCUMSTANCES.

Subject.

When everything seems to be lost beyond hope of redemption, then is the time for us to put our hope and trust in prayer to God more firmly than ever.—*Preached in the year 1740, during a time of public prayers for a good season.*

¹ Tibi, Domine, iustitia, nobis autem confusio faciei. — Dan. ix. 7.

² Inclina, Deus meus, aurem tuam et audi; aperi oculos tuos, et vide desolationem nostram et civitatem super quam invocatum est nomen tuum; neque enim in justificationibus nostris prosternimus preces ante faciem tuam, sed in miserationibus tuis multis. Exaudi Domine, placare Domine; attende et fac; ne moreris propter temetipsum, Deus meus; quia nomen tuum invocatum est super civitatem et super populum tuum. — Ibid. 18-19.

Text.

Ecce non est abbreviata manus Domini, ut salvare nequeat, neque aggravata est auris ejus ut non exaudiat.—Isa. lix. 1.

“Behold, the hand of the Lord is not shortened, that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.”

Introduction.

But what is the use of praying for favorable weather? The season is over; there is no hope of the wine-crop; most of the vines have been destroyed by the harsh cold of the winter; the remainder have ceased to blossom; the cold nights, the morning mists, and the incessant rain leave us but little hope; the sap drawn up from the earth runs chiefly into wood. What hope, then, is there of the grapes coming to maturity? If we have not a second summer in place of the autumn this year, our wine crop is gone beyond hope, and the poor people along the Moselle may write it down among their debts and other misfortunes; nay, as matters stand, the prospect for next year is not a whit better. What, then, is the good of prayer under such circumstances? Such, my dear brethren, are the complaints that we hear now and then during this unfavorable weather. But, O ye of little faith! for so I must address you in my displeasure, as Judith addressed the inhabitants of Bethulia, when they were about to surrender to the enemy, in despair of finding help: “Who are you that tempt the Lord? This is not a word that may draw down mercy, but rather that may stir up wrath, and enkindle indignation. You have set a time for the mercy of the Lord, and you have appointed Him a day, according to your pleasure.”¹ Will you, then, set bounds to the almighty power and goodness of God, as if He were obliged to observe seasons? Where is your faith? Where your hope and confidence? No, Christians; “the hand of the Lord is not shortened, that it cannot save” and send us an abundant harvest; “nor is His ear heavy, that it cannot hear” our confiding prayers. And therefore, as Judith advised her fellow-citizens, “Let us humble our souls before Him. . . Let us humbly wait for His consolation.”² But, you object, there is, humanly speaking, no hope of a harvest. I grant you that; and what then? That is no reason for saying that it

¹ Qui estis vos, qui tentatis Dominum? Non est iste sermo qui misericordiam provocet sed potius qui iram excitet et furorem accendat. Posuistis vos tempus miserationis Domini, et in arbitrium vestrum diem constituistis ei.—Jud. viii. 11-13.

² Et ideo humillemus illi animas nostras. . . expectemus humiles consolationem ejus.—Ibid. 16-20.

is too late to pray; it is, on the contrary, as I maintain, a reason for praying all the more fervently and confidently, and for hoping all the more firmly that the year will yet bring us abundant blessings, as I shall now try to prove as briefly as possible.

Plan of Discourse.

When everything seems to be lost beyond hope of redemption, then is the time for us to put our hope and trust in prayer to God more firmly than ever. Therefore we must now persevere fervently in prayer. Such is the whole subject.

Almighty God, who art infinitely faithful to Thy promises, by the intercession of our Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels we beg of Thee to increase and preserve in us Thy sanctifying grace, and at the same time to grant us a confident hope and child-like trust in Thee in our fervent prayers; and then we shall see that, even when things seem to be in the most desperate state, Thy hand is not shortened.

Nearly every one in the world is encouraged and induced to persevere in his labor by the hope of attaining a good result. The hope of an abundant harvest urges the husbandman to work hard in the sweat of his brow in his fields and vineyards; the hope of victory and booty encourages the soldier in battle, so that he disregards even the imminent danger of death; the hope of temporal gain impels the merchant to travel over sea and land, and to consume his life in constant anxiety and bitter cares; the hope of becoming learned and of making a name some day before the world incites the student to work hard at his books and to undergo the usual discomforts of school life; the hope of regaining health makes the sick man swallow bitter pills and distasteful medicine, although his very nature revolts against them; the hope of procuring their daily bread encourages laborers in their workshops and servants in their employment to work hard every day. All live on and with hope. But this lasts only as long as there are reasonable grounds for expecting that one can obtain what one toils for; for if difficulties are foreseen so great that no labor, or care, or trouble will suffice to overcome them, and there is no prospect of attaining the desired end, then hope disappears, and with it the courage necessary to persevere in one's labor. Such, my dear brethren, is the case when we speak of a natural hope, which is founded on mere natural and human means.

Natural hope is lost when the means of success are wanting.

Supernatural hope grows stronger the more hopeless things seem.

But it is quite different with a supernatural hope and with the confidence we should place in God. This latter we should never lose nor allow to decrease; it ought rather to grow stronger the more difficulties and obstacles seem to arise between us and the desired end. Nay, if we find by experience that all the human means we have used up to the present have been to no purpose; if we foresee that they will be of little use in the future, and if, humanly speaking, everything appears lost, then must our supernatural hope and confidence of attaining our end be all the stronger, in spite of the difficulties that lie in our way. And why so? Because this hope is not built on the power or efficacy of human means, nor on one's own labor or diligence, so that whether these latter are able to effect anything or not matters little, but it is founded on the almighty God alone, to whom nothing is impossible, whose might and strength no difficulty can hinder, who by one act of His will can restore things that are utterly despaired of, and who finds it as easy to help when human aid is useless, as He finds it easy to refuse His help when everything, humanly speaking, seems to be going on prosperously. Therefore I can never have reasonable grounds for wavering in such a hope, or for doubting as to a favorable result, although things seem to me to be in a very bad state indeed.

For God is wont to defer helping us, that we may ascribe our success to Him alone.

Nay, I have said that our hope must grow all the firmer on that account. Why? Because it is founded on a God of infinite wisdom and goodness, who is accustomed to help those who trust in Him, especially when natural means are either wanting to them, or are insufficient, and who often refuses His help until matters are in an almost desperate state, that He may see whether we have a firm trust in Him, and also that, after a favorable result has been obtained, we may ascribe the success to His goodness alone. If the Lord were always to grant us favorable weather, according to our wishes, we should often look on such a blessing, not as a special gift of God, but as some effect proceeding from purely natural causes, and we should not thank God for it as we ought; and experience proves the truth of this assertion in other matters as well. After an important law-suit that has terminated favorably for us; if husband, wife, child, or friend recovers from a dangerous illness, which filled us with anxiety; if we escape a sudden danger, or an impending calamity, how do we act? We are filled with joy; we congratulate each other a thousand times; but what thanks or service do we render the divine generosity for the favor received? Do we become more

zealous in the service of God, in the love of our neighbor? more humble and modest in our outward demeanor? more merciful and generous to the poor and needy? more devout in prayer? more diligent in the reception of the sacraments? more reverent in the church? more careful in training up our children in a Christian manner? more conscientious in avoiding dangerous company, and the occasions of sin? more determined in our efforts to shun all, even venial sin? No, indeed! things go on in the old way; hardly do we even offer our sincere thanks to God. This is an evident sign of gross ingratitude, or of a want of due recognition of the benefit received, so that we do not look on it as an effect of the divine goodness. Therefore, I repeat, God often defers helping us; He allows us to toil and labor to no purpose, and waits till things are almost despaired of, so that we cannot expect to succeed by any natural means. Then, if we have not altogether lost hope in Him, He brings the affair to a happy termination, either at once, or little by little, that we may be forced to acknowledge and confess that no one but the almighty God has helped us, and therefore that we owe our thanks and special gratitude to Him alone.

He often acted in that way with His chosen people in the Old Law. When the Israelites were brought by Moses out of Egypt into the Promised Land, they seemed to be at first in the greatest danger of utter destruction; before them was the Red Sea, to whose shore they had to flee from their enemies; on either side of them were high mountains, which they could not cross, and behind them was the cruel Pharaoh, with all his host. They cried out to God for help, says the Scripture: "And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, saw the Egyptians behind them, and they feared exceedingly and cried to the Lord."¹ But the Lord seemed not to hear them, and after having prayed and cried in vain, they found themselves on the shore of the Red Sea, with their enemies close behind them. They thought it was all over with them. Ah, said they to Moses, would that we had remained in Egypt! for now we shall certainly be cut to pieces: "Perhaps there were no graves in Egypt, therefore thou hast brought us out to die in the wilderness. Is not this the word that we spoke to thee in Egypt, saying: Depart from us, that we may serve the Egyptians? for it was much

Proved from
the Old Testament.

¹ Cumque appropinquasset Pharaon, levantes filii Israel oculos, viderunt Aegyptios post se, et timuerunt valde, clamaveruntque ad Dominum.—Exod. xiv. 10.

better to serve them than to die in the wilderness.”¹ Why do you despair? cried out Moses; do not lose confidence; put your trust in God! He has allowed us to get into this difficulty that He may see whether we trust firmly in Him; the greater the danger, the more evident and glorious will be the proofs of His power; “fear not; stand, and see the great wonders of the Lord, which He will do this day.”² Be not afraid of the multitude of your enemies: “The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace;”³ to your great joy, you shall see the destruction of your enemies. And the event justified those words, for when Moses stretched his rod over the waters, they divided, and allowed the Israelites to pass over dry-shod, while the pursuing enemy was swallowed up before their eyes: “And the waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen of all the army of Pharaoh, who had come into the sea after them, neither did there so much as one of them remain. And the Lord delivered Israel in that day out of the hands of the Egyptians. Then Moses and the children of Israel sung this canticle to the Lord, and said: Let us sing to the Lord, for He is gloriously magnified;”⁴ now we see that the Lord is our strength and our hope: “The Lord is my strength and my praise, and He is become salvation to me; He is my God, I will glorify Him; the God of my father, and I will exalt Him.”⁵ See, my dear brethren, how wonderfully God can help us when all seems lost, and how He thereby wins the thanks and grateful recognition of men.

From the
raising of
Lazarus, in
the Gospel.

How did Christ, Our Saviour, act in the New Law, in order to inculcate on all Christians this confidence in God? Lazarus alone is an evidence of it in the Gospel of St. John. He had fallen dangerously ill; his two sisters, Martha and Mary, knowing that he was a special friend of Our Lord, troubled themselves little about his illness, thinking that they would soon be

¹ Forsitan non erant sepulchra in Ægypto, ideo tulisti nos ut moreremur in solitudine. Nonne iste est sermo, quem loquebamur ad te in Ægypto, dicentes: recede a nobis, ut serviamus Ægyptiis? multo enim melius erat servire eis, quam mori in solitudine.—Exod. xiv. 11, 12.

² Nolite timere; state et videte magnalia Domini, quæ facturus est hodie.—Ibid. 13.

³ Dominus pugnabit pro vobis, et vos tacebitis.—Ibid. 14.

⁴ Reversæque sunt aquæ, et opernerunt currus et equites cuncti exercitus Pharaonis, qui sequentes ingressi fuerant mare; nec unus quidem superfuit ex eis. Liberavitque Dominus in die illa Israel de manu Ægyptiorum. Tunc cecinit Moyses et filii Israel carmen hoc Domino, et dixerunt: cantemus Domino; gloriose enim magnificatus est.—Ibid. 28, 30; xv. 1.

⁵ Fortitudo mea et laus mea Dominus, et factus est mihi in salutem; iste Deus meus, et glorificabo eum; Deus patris mei, et exultabo eum.—Ibid. xv. 2.

able to help him. They sent therefore at once to Christ, saying: "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick."¹ What did Jesus do? He took no notice, but remained where He was for two days: "When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He still remained in the same place two days."² But why does the merciful Saviour, who is always so willing to help, delay so long, while his dear friend is in danger of death, although He could easily have restored him to health? And in fact Lazarus dies meanwhile, and his sorrowing sisters are disappointed of the hope they placed in their prayers and trust in Christ. Were they really disappointed? No, that cannot be. But Lazarus is already dead. No matter. Of course, a mere natural, human hope must be given up under such circumstances, and therefore, when Martha came to meet Jesus, she said to Him, with tears in her eyes: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."³ Still, Our Lord delayed and did not enter the house until Mary, the other sister, had appeared and made the same complaint; then at last He asked: "Where have you laid him?"⁴ Here I must again ask, why did not Our Lord go at once, at the first question of Martha? Why did He wait till Mary, too, came up? Because the death of Lazarus was not yet placed beyond the possibility of a doubt, since his corpse had not yet commenced to decay in the grave. If Christ had restored him to health when he was sick, the friends and neighbors would have, as is usual in such circumstances, ascribed his cure to medicines and other natural means, and not to Christ; therefore Our Lord waited till Lazarus was dead. And if He had raised him to life immediately after death, the envious Jews, who were always trying to invent calumnies against Him, would have spread the report that Lazarus was not dead in reality, but had merely fallen into a trance; and so the people would not have thought much of the miracle. But now that Lazarus was four days in the grave, so that his body exhibited unmistakable signs of decay, it was high time to show that the supernatural hope placed in God alone cannot be disappointed; for under the circumstances no one could doubt of the miracle, or ascribe its effect to anything but the power of Christ.

"See how He acts," says St. Peter Chrysologus; "He waits Therefore we should

¹ Domine, ecce quem amas infirmatur. — John xi. 3.

² Ut ergo audivit quia infirmabatur, tunc quidem mansit in eodem loco duobus diebus. — Ibid. 6.

³ Domine, si fuisses hic, frater meus non fuisset mortuus. — Ibid. 21.

⁴ Ubi posuistis eum? — Ibid. 34.

510 *Prayer in Apparently Desperate Circumstances.*

put our
trust in
God.

till there is no more room for human hope, and till men utterly despair." And why? "In order to show that what He was about to do was divine, not human."¹ Such, too, was the meaning of what Christ said to His disciples while Lazarus was still sick: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it,"² and to show men that they are not to lose confidence, even when things appear to be in a most desperate state. From all this, my dear brethren, we must conclude that we should never lose confidence in God in any calamity or misfortune, nor let it waver in the least; nay, since God allows our troubles to go beyond the limit of human hope, that we may ascribe our subsequent relief from them to His goodness alone, our hope in desperate circumstances should rather increase and become firmer; and consequently in our present state, when, as those of little faith say, there is no human hope of a good harvest, not without reason do we send up our prayers to God; not without reason do we hope and trust that He will hear and grant our petitions.

We have
often expe-
rienced the
help of God,
when we
thought all
was lost.

Have we not often experienced the help of God in a wonderful manner in similar circumstances? How often has it not occurred that we were all in the greatest trouble with regard to the harvest, either on account of the drought, or of the long-continued rains; but hardly had we commenced public prayers, when we obtained from heaven either the wished-for rain, or favorable weather? Even now we have evident proof of this. A few days ago public prayers were commanded by ecclesiastical authority, and on the following Thursday the sky brightened up at once, so that the good God seemed to hear our prayers before we had well commenced them. What think you of this, O ye of little faith? Is our prayer of no use, or too late?

Especially
of late
years.

Go back now in thought to the spring of this year. If any one had then said to us, even in the middle of the month of May, rejoice, good people! as far as our vineyards, fields, and orchards are concerned, we shall have an abundant year; there will be no want of vegetables, fruit, hay, barley, and wheat; would we not all have laughed at him as a false prophet? Were we not then in despair about these crops? Alas, we said, what misery stares us in the face! Everything was frozen up during the

¹ Videtis quemadmodum agit, ut humana spes tota pereat, tota vis mundanæ desperationis accedat. Quatenus quod facturum est, divinum sit, non humanum.—S. Pet. Chrysost. serm. lxxii.

² Infirmis hæc non est ad mortem, sed pro gloria Dei, ut glorificetur Filius Dei per eam.—John xi. 4.

winter, and the winter seems to continue into the middle of spring; there is no promise of a summer; the crops and fruit are destroyed; we dare not hope for a wine crop; famine and scarcity are before our doors. Such were our lamentations. And in truth we had no better prospects at the time. Nevertheless, we now see before our eyes, thanks be to God for it! what we never dared to hope for during the spring, vegetables, fruit, corn: and everything we have in abundance. And when did the weather begin to change for the better? Was it not after we had begun public prayers in the churches? Where are you now, O ye of little faith? Do you still think our prayer useless and too late? Truly, my dear brethren, when I reflect on the wonderful events of this year, and consider them seriously, I am forced to say that the good God has wrought a miracle, so to speak, in favor of our country and especially of the archdiocese of Treves. For we have already seen how, when winter crops fail, there is the greatest misery in the land, a great scarcity of bread-stuffs, and almost a famine amongst the people; and that was the case even when we could buy corn from the neighboring countries, that had not suffered as we had. Now, this year, nearly over the whole world, and in the neighboring countries, according to report, fruitful as they are otherwise, there are lamentations everywhere on account of the failure of the harvest, and the scarcity of corn, a scarcity that has continued in some places up to the present time. Now the places from which we were used to draw our supplies are closed to us, in great part, and yet, who would believe it? we have not in this archdiocese experienced any extraordinary difficulty in finding corn or other necessities of life, so that foreigners who have come into the country are surprised, and think that, in comparison with other places, it is a paradise; and when they find that bread can be had so cheaply at the bakers' shops, they exclaim with gratitude: "God be praised! in Treves, at all events, we can have a bit of bread to eat." Infinite thanks to Thee, O God of goodness! Thy faithful servants, who are here assembled, have no doubt by their fervent prayers obtained that extraordinary blessing from Thee.

From this, my dear brethren, I draw the following conclusion: if the Lord permits us to fall into the extreme of want, so that we may afterwards more readily ascribe our relief to Him, if God has helped us already in such a wonderful manner when our state seemed to be desperate, can we now think that His al-

Therefore
God can and
will help us
now, al-
though
things seem

to be in a
hopeless
state.

mighty hand is shortened, so that He is unable to help us in our present wants, great as they are and beyond all human hope of relief? If the good God has so often assisted us when we began our public prayers to Him, can we believe that He has now closed His ears, and that He is deaf to our petitions?

Unless our
sins prevent
Him.

But if He is really unwilling to hear us, truly I know the reason! For it is none other than that which the Prophet Isaias adds after the words of my text, "The hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy that it cannot hear;" He is not wanting in power or goodness to help us. What, then, is the cause? "But your iniquities have divided between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He should not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue uttereth iniquity. There is none that calleth upon justice, neither is there any one that judgeth truly. Their works are unprofitable works, and the work of iniquity is in their hands. Their feet run to evil." Truly, my dear brethren, herein lies the whole difficulty. Such was the meaning of the question that the Prophet Baruch asked the Israelites when they were dragged away from their native land as captives into Assyria: "How happened it, O Israel, that thou art in thy enemies' land,"¹ and that thou art now a captive? I will tell thee: "Thou hast forsaken the fountain of wisdom."² Thou hast abandoned God, and forgotten His commandments. "For if thou hadst walked in the way of God, thou hadst surely dwelt in peace forever."³ I might address the same question and the same reproof to many countries at the present time. Why do the heavens seem so unmerciful to you? Why do you sigh and pray to God for favorable weather, without being heard by Him? Do you wish to know why? You have forsaken the fountain of wisdom; you are not yet resolved to amend your lives; for if you were you would find the heavens more favorable to you. Therefore, sinners, be converted to God by true penance; change your lives for the better; and when

¹ Sed iniquitates vestrae diviserunt inter vos et Deum vestrum, et peccata vestra absconderunt faciem ejus a vobis, ne exaudiret. Manus enim vestrae pollutae sunt sanguine, et digiti vestri iniquitate. Labia vestra locuta sunt mendacium, et lingua vestra iniquitatem fatetur. Non est qui invocet justitiam, neque est qui judicet vere. Opera eorum opera inutilia, et opus iniquitatis in manibus eorum. Pedes eorum ad malum currunt.—Isa. lix. 2, 3, 4, 6, 7.

² Quid est, Israel, quod in terra inimicorum es?—Bar. iii. 10.

³ Dereliquisti fontem sapientiae.—Ibid. 12.

⁴ Nam si in via Dei ambulasses, habitasses utique in pace sempiterna.—Ibid. 13.

you have done that, unite with just and pious Christians in fervent prayer, and you will see that our prayers are neither useless nor too late; and let us all be on our guard not to disturb the order of Providence by mistrust and want of faith, lest the Lord should withhold the blessings He has prepared for us, provided we fly to His fatherly care with child-like confidence.

O almighty, infinitely good, and most generous God, we know of no refuge but in Thy mercy! We see no human or natural means of obtaining relief in our present necessities! But for that very reason we trust all the more in Thy almighty hand, which is not shortened, and which can still pour down abundant blessings on us. For that very reason we trust all the more in Thy goodness, which is not lessened, and which will be ready to hear our united prayers. But perhaps it is our sins that prevent Thy blessing from coming down upon our land? If such is the case, we humbly acknowledge our guilt; with contrite hearts we repent of and detest all that has hitherto displeased Thee in our conduct, and make a firm resolution of serving Thee in future with all the greater zeal. With contrite hearts, then, and this firm purpose, we now stretch forth our hands to Thee in heaven; to Thee we address our united prayers, and implore Thy divine blessing, confident and assured that, if it is for the good of our souls, Thou wilt hear our prayer, so that, in addition to the many wonderful effects of Thy goodness that we have already experienced, we may have now a new reason to praise, to love, and to bless Thee as our sovereign Benefactor here in time and hereafter in eternity. Amen.

Conclusion
and confident
appeal
to God.

SEVENTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER TO ST. SEBASTIAN IN DANGER
OF WAR AND IN OTHER CALAMITIES.

Subject.

At the present time we have special reason for appealing to St. Sebastian, as a helper in all necessities.—*Preached on the feast of St. Sebastian, in the year 1727.*

Text.

Voca ergo, si est qui tibi respondeat, et ad aliquem sanctorum convertere.—Job v. 1.

“Call now if there be any that will answer thee, and turn to some of the saints.”

Introduction.

Such was the comfort that Eliphaz gave his friend Job when the latter, abandoned by all and full of misery, was sitting on the dunghill, sighing forth: “The arrows of the Lord are in me, the rage thereof drinketh up my spirit, and the terrors of the Lord war against me.”¹ Unhappy man, said Eliphaz to him, since there is nothing but suffering for you wherever you turn, and the Lord seems to have abandoned you and to have taken up arms against you, then turn your eyes elsewhere, let your voice be heard in some other quarter: “Call now if there be any that will answer thee, and turn to some of the saints.” The feast that we celebrate to-day, my dear brethren, has suggested those words to me as a text fitting the troublous times in which we live. O city of Treves! “Call now if there be any that will answer thee, and turn to some of the saints,” so would I wish to address thee, if I did not see that thou hast already turned to one of the saints, and art imploring his help on bended knees. Yet, in order to encourage thee to persevere in that most advantageous work of devotion, I repeat—

Plan of Discourse.

Just reason hast thou now for appealing to one of the saints, and especially to thy holy patron, St. Sebastian. Such is the whole subject of this panegyric. Therefore call on that saint, but with pure and repentant hearts, if you wish to be heard by him. Such will be the conclusion.

O powerful advocate, holy St. Sebastian! I, too, offer up my petition to thee; give me some of the eloquence with which thou didst during thy life on earth move the minds of men to love God and to persevere in the faith, that I may be able to promote devotion to thee and confidence in thy help in the minds of some at least, and that we may all be induced to do true penance and to amend our lives! Help us herein, O holy angels, and thou especially, Mary, Queen of Martyrs.

**We are now
in danger of
a great and
general cal-
amity.**

No matter how abandoned a man may be, unless he has lost his senses, or has fallen into despair, he looks out for some means of help when he is threatened with a great danger. In what

¹ Sagittæ Domini in me sunt, quarum indignatio exhibet spiritum meum, et terrores Domini militant contra me.—Job vi. 4.

state are we now, my dear brethren? In what sort of times do we live? We have no difficulty in answering that question; sad experience teaches us plainly enough. But what is in store for us in the future? That we do not yet know; we hope for the best and fear the worst; but we have little ground for hope, while our fears appear to be only too well founded. Indeed, I might hold my tongue and let you yourselves speak. Your hands that you stretch forth in public and united prayer during these days; your knees that are bent before the altars; the fasting and abstinence that you offered up to God yesterday as a sign of humiliation; the alms and penance to which preachers exhort you, all these things show forth that a calamity threatens our land, and that it is well worth our while to try to appease the wrath of God in order to avert it. "The terrors of the Lord war against me," we might say with the afflicted Job. Moreover, the signs and terrible portents of impending danger that are to be seen in the heavens speak plainly, too. There are some who look on them as forerunners of famine, pestilence, or war. Be that as it may, for I do not understand anything of prophecy; experience, at all events, tells us that such signs are seldom followed by anything good. What do people see, and hear, and speak of in the world? From all sides comes the news of warlike preparations. On all sides the minds of Christian potentates appear to be embittered against each other. Everywhere recruiting is carried on, arms are prepared, and, if that is true which is written, spoken of, threatened, and feared, the whole of Europe will soon be in a blaze, and along with war, we shall have its inseparable companions to expect, namely, a number of other evils and miseries.

Deplorable, O Treves, will thy state be, if God does not inspire certain potentates to unite their forces and to avert the worst horrors of war from thee! For who would have more to suffer than thou? Who would feel the burden more heavily, for thou art generally the first to suffer? We know well how that land fares which has to support the enemy in its midst. Many and many a time hast thou had experience of it. What wert thou formerly? What wouldst thou now be, if the burden of war had not pressed on thee so heavily? To say nothing of ancient times, how often dost thou not now turn thy tearful eyes to the years 1673-74-75, and the first years of the present century? Nor are the wounds thou didst receive in the wars then yet healed; the teeth of many children are still set on edge by the bitter mor-

Which will be particularly severe for us.

sels their fathers had to swallow. The broken bridge over the Moselle, the convents and churches burnt and plundered, the sad traces, near at hand, too, of conflagration and plunder, of the passage of a rude soldiery, of the contributions and taxes levied on an exhausted land, speak eloquently of the evils that war has caused thee. But to no purpose do I renew thy sorrow by recalling such sad events to thy memory, for, as it is, thou hast enough to sadden thee. Unhappy Treves, I say again, if fresh calamities are in store for thee, in addition to those which thou hast suffered already and of which thou still feelest the smart.

We have reason, then, for appealing to heaven for help.

Good reason hast thou, therefore, while the terrors of the Lord menace thee with new evils, and make war against thee, to look carefully around thee to see if there be any means of securing help. "Call now if there be any that will answer thee." Let thy sighs and prayers ascend to heaven, from which alone advice and help can be expected, for there is no hope elsewhere; nay, without whose assistance all other means must come to naught. Fly to the Lord of heaven for refuge, for He has the hearts of all potentates in His hands; in a moment He can change their plans, confound their might, and protect thee when thy condition seems most desperate, and even raise thee up whilst thou art in the very act of falling. And this is what the gracious Lord seeks by His threats and terrors, or rather I should call them the warnings of His goodness and mercy. For by those threats and terrible signs of His wrath He gives us to understand that it is not always His intention to punish and actually to smite us, but rather to warn and exhort us to appeal to Him and His saints with humble and penitent hearts, and thus to wrest out of His hand the rod He has seized to strike us.

For God is wont to help us at the intercession of His saints.

"Turn to some of the saints." In the Fourth Book of Kings we read that the kings of Israel, Juda, and Edom entered into an alliance against the Moabites. While on the march they came with their three great armies to a dry, desert place, in which there was no water for men, or horses, or beasts of burden. What were they to do? Joram, the king of Israel, began at once to lose heart and to complain of God, as if He were the cause of the misfortune: "And the king of Israel said: Alas, alas, alas, the Lord hath gathered us three kings together, to deliver us into the hands of Moab."¹ Truly, a foolish complaint! as if one could find water by giving way to despair, and appease

¹ Dixitque rex Israel; heu, heu, heu, congregavit nos Dominus tres reges, ut traderet in manus Moab.—IV. Kings iii. 10.

God by not being resigned to His will! Josaphat, the king of Juda, had better ideas, that were more becoming his piety; his advice was to appeal to some prophet, who by his prayers might obtain the necessary help from God. "And Josaphat said: is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may beseech the Lord by him? And one of the servants of the king of Israel answered: Here is Eliseus, the son of Saphat, who poured water on the hands of Elias."¹ Mark, my dear brethren, the connection between those two things, pouring water on the hands of Elias, and obtaining water from heaven. Why did they hope for the latter through the prayers of Eliseus? The commentators of holy Scripture answer by saying that, since Eliseus had faithfully served Elias, who had obtained water at the request of king Achab, there was good reason for hoping that, if Eliseus prayed to his former master, he would obtain by his intercession the water they were so much in need of. And the event justified their expectations. "Thus saith the Lord," said the Prophet to them: "you shall not see wind nor rain; and yet this channel shall be filled with waters, and you shall drink, you and your families, and your beasts."² There you have an example of how we, too, should act in our present circumstances. It is by the saints in heaven that God wishes to dispense His graces, not that He cannot do that immediately of Himself, but to make known their glory to the world, as they honored and served Him during their lives on earth. And this is the teaching of St. Thomas: "By their means divine charity produces its effects in us."³ They are the mediators between Christ and men, who by their prayers free us from our necessities; and therefore for every trial and misfortune God has appointed one of His saints as our patron and deliverer. "Call now if there be any that will answer thee, and turn to some of the saints." Turn thy eyes, O Treves, heavenwards, and see if there be any one there who will answer thee and come to thy aid.

But what am I saying? If there be any one there who will aid thee? Thou certainly hast thy patron saints in heaven, and amongst countless others even the very one before whose altar you are now assembled, to renew your vows in His honor, ac-

tion is our
helper in all
necessities.

¹ Et ait Josaphat: estne hic propheta Domini, ut deprecemur Dominum per eum? Et respondit unus de servis regis Israel: est hic Eliseus, filius Saphat, qui fundebat aquam super manus Eliae.—IV. Kings iii. 11.

² Hæc dicit Dominus: non videbitis ventum, neque pluviam, et alueus iste replebitur aquis, et bibetis vos, et familie vestrae, et jumenta vestra.—Ibid. 17.

³ Per eos divina charitas in nos suum effectum infundit.

cording to the rules of your celebrated confraternity, and to offer Him your sincere thanks, namely, the glorious martyr St. Sebastian. It is well known all over the world that he is a powerful protector against pestilence; that we all have just reason for imploring his help with confidence in all other necessities and dangers, I will prove on another occasion. But it is not only from pestilence that St. Sebastian can protect us; the Lord has given to this faithful servant of His a special power, that few saints have, namely, of helping in every necessity. Therefore some maintain that God allowed him to be set up as a target for arrows, that the world might have a protector and patron who by his powerful intercession would intercept all the arrows of the divine anger, an anger which the Prophet David likens to a bow. "Except you will be converted, He will brandish His sword; He hath bent His bow and made it ready. And in it He hath prepared the instruments of death, He hath made ready His arrows for them that burn."¹ Not without reason does the Catholic Church appoint for this feast that part of the Gospel of St. Luke, "And all the multitude sought to touch Him: for virtue went out from Him, and healed all."²

Shown from
miracles
wrought by
his interces-
sion.

There is hardly a nation in Europe that does not acknowledge its obligations to this Saint; there is no illness, or other evil, no matter what its name may be, whether public or private, against which he is not invoked, against which he has not already often stretched out his powerful hand. Do you wish to have a proof of this? Read the Bollandists, who have compiled the life of this Saint from the most ancient documents and records, and you may read for hours proofs of his wonderful power, which time does not allow me to quote for you. In former times, to enter a church dedicated to St. Sebastian, to venerate his relics, or merely to touch with reverence and confidence a cloth that had been applied to them, was enough to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, soundness of limb to cripples, to cleanse lepers, free those possessed of the devil, and restore hope and courage to the despairing. Many miracles of the kind have been wrought at Piacenza, where some of his bones were brought, and at Soissons, in France, where they rest. "So powerful is this Saint," says the historian, "in relieving all kinds of necessities, that no one could understand the number

¹ Nisi conversi fueritis, gladium suum vibrabit; arcum suum tetendit et paravit illum, et in eo paravit vasa mortis; sagittas suas ardentibus effecit.—Ps. vii. 13, 14.

² Et omnis turba querebat eum tangere; quia virtus de illo exibat, et sanabat omnes.—Luke vi. 19.

of miracles wrought by him, or relate them in words; and the multitude of people who flock to his shrine resemble a swarm of locusts and fill the neighboring towns.”¹

As far as the dangers of war in particular are concerned, the pious hero Eberhard, when he was besieged in a castle by the Hungarians and was deprived of all hope of human aid, by the mere invocation of St. Sebastian was enabled, not only to keep off the enemy, but also to overcome them with great slaughter. Maximilian, duke of Bavaria, being reduced to the greatest straits, had to fly before his enemies and to abandon everything to them; but he caused the relics of St. Sebastian to be carried into the camp, as the Israelites of old did the Ark of the Covenant, and thereby he was enabled to save his own life and that of his troops. The emperor Louis, surnamed the Pious, describes how he experienced immediate relief and assistance at the intercession of the holy Martyr; for when some of his soldiers and his own sons rebelled against him and expelled him from the throne, he besought St. Sebastian to help him, making the usual vow in his honor, and it is to his intercession that he ascribed his restoration to the throne; the same Saint also revealed to him the day of his death. Many cities, especially Rome, Milan, and Soissons, look on St. Sebastian as their deliverer from destruction. In the latter place, as some of its inhabitants assure us, there were heard some time ago, throughout the town and in the neighboring villages, terrible cries and a voice announcing a threefold woe, threatening the town with the fate of Sodom; these cries proceeded from the top of a certain tower; the people attribute it to the powerful intercession of their holy patron St. Sebastian that this threat was not carried into execution, as you may see in detail in the second volume of the Bollandists, under the date of January the 20th.

He is a special helper in the dangers of war.

I am not astonished, then, to find that the honor and glory of this great Saint is spread so widely over the world. Truly, none of the holy martyrs is held in greater reverence and is more generally honored than St. Sebastian. There is hardly a Catholic town to be found which has not at least his picture in the churches or in public streets. Both towns and the country districts, as the Bollandists testify, seemed to vie with each other, when his name came first to be known and venerated, in procuring a relic

And therefore is honored as a patron almost over the whole world.

¹ Tanta virtutum vis in omni genere sanitarum in nomine ejusdem beatissimi martyris emicuit, ut a nullo mortalium eorumdem miraculorum aut numerus comprehendit, aut varias verbis valeat enuntiare. -Bolland. in vita.

of him. Those that succeeded in obtaining even a small particle of his bones looked on it as the most precious treasure, which they were ready to defend at the risk of their lives; and lately the Holy See has declared him the patron and protector of the Catholic Church, to whom she is to fly in all her troubles and necessities, imploring his help in the following prayer: "Giant, O Lord, that amid the trials that we suffer for our sins we may obtain, by the intercession of Thy Blessed Martyr Sebastian, that which our confidence cannot procure for us."¹

Therefore:
he can help
us now.

Since that is the case, my dear brethren, we have a well-grounded hope and confidence that, in spite of the dangers that threaten us, we shall in reality have nothing to fear. Let us only continue with renewed fervor the devotion we have begun in honor of this mighty intercessor, who is so powerful with God. If he undertakes to protect our city, and to defend it with the arrows that pierced him, we shall be far safer from the attacks of the enemy and from the ravages of pestilence than we should be in the strongest fortress. "Behold, the hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save," says the Prophet Isaias of the almighty God; the same might be said of our holy Martyr; his power with the Lord is not lessened, that he cannot help us. He who has freed so many thousands from calamity, and so many cities and countries from destruction, can help us, too, in our necessities, and avert from us, by his intercession, what we fear. And why should he not help us as well as others, if he finds that we are equally devoted to him, and have equal confidence in him? We are children of the Catholic Church, whose patron he has been named by Pope Caius. There is no doubt about it; he can and will help us, if there is nothing on our side to prevent him; for the same God is still in heaven, and He is as willing now as ever to hear the prayers of His saints.

And ap-
pease the
anger of
God against
us.

Is God, perhaps, angry with us on account of our sins, and is it on that account that He has drawn His sword of vengeance and threatened us with grievous afflictions? But He is at the same time a God of infinite mercy, who is easily appeased, and who, as I have told you before, threatens us, that we may have time to look about us for the means of escaping punishment. Angry as He was with the friends of Job, yet He referred them to one who by his intercession would obtain mercy and pardon for them: "My wrath is kindled against thee," said He to Eli-

¹ Ut inter adversa quæ pro delictorum debito sustinemus, quod fiducia nostra non obtinet, beati Martyris tui Sebastiani intercessione consequamur.

phaz, "and against thy two friends, because you have not spoken the thing that is right before Me. Take unto you, therefore, seven oxen and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer for yourselves a holocaust: and My servant Job shall pray for you: his face I will accept, that your folly be not imputed to you."¹ Imagine that the Lord now speaks to us in the same way, my dear brethren. My anger is kindled against you; great misfortunes are hanging over you, and are now near at hand; yet go to My servants, turn to some of My saints, fly with confidence to Sebastian, and offer sacrifice: he will pray for you; his face I will receive, that the punishments impending over you on account of your sins may not be inflicted on you. "Offer for yourselves a holocaust;" that you do when you assemble every week before the altar of that great servant of God, and assist at the august sacrifice of the Mass. Oh, would that the example of this confraternity inspired all with a similar devotion!

Go, then, all of you, to My servant, for the danger threatens all; offer a holocaust; but take heed that your sacrifice is united with the inward sacrifice of the soul, that, namely, of which My Prophet David says to Me: "A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit; a contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise,"² that is, a heart filled with sorrow for its sins, a heart that is cleansed from sin. If that is wanting, exterior works of devotion and recourse to the saints will avail nothing. "For this," says the Psalmist, "shall every one that is holy pray to Thee, in a seasonable time."³ That is, according to Cardinal Hugo, "when one firmly purposes to abandon sin."⁴ If we neglect to do this, the same fate shall befall us as that with which God threatened Moab by the Prophet Isaias: "He shall go into his sanctuaries to pray and shall not prevail."⁵ The wicked shall appear in My churches, prostrate themselves before My altars, and implore the intercession of My saints; but they shall implore in vain; they shall, to their great grief, experience the effects of My anger and shall feel the blows of My rod.

Let us go back in thought to the kings of whom I have already

We must appeal to him, then, but at the same time we should repent and amend.

Otherwise the saints

¹ Iratus est furor meus in te, et in duos amicos tuos, quoniam non estis locuti coram me rectum. Sumite ergo vobis septem tauros et septem arietes, et ite ad servum meum Job, et offerite holocaustum pro vobis; Job autem servus meus orabit pro vobis; faciem ejus suscipiam, ut non vobis imputetur stultitia.—Job. xlii. 7, 8.

² Sacrificium Deo spiritus contribulatus: cor contritum et humillatum, Deus, non despicies.—Ps. l. 19.

³ Pro hac orabit ad te omnis sanctus, in tempore opportuno.—Ps. xxxi. 6.

⁴ Cum homo habet propositum relinquendi peccata.

⁵ Ingredietur ad sancta sua, ut obsecret, et non valebit.—Isa. xvi. 12.

will speak
against us,
and not for
us.

spoken, and who were suffering from want of water; they humbled themselves before the Prophet Eliseus; they went to the servant of God and cast themselves at his feet: "And the king of Israel, and Josaphat, king of Juda, and the king of Edom went down to him."¹ So do we, too, act, to obtain the help of the saints in our grievous necessities; we humble ourselves before them; lords and ladies, the gentle and simple, all bend the knee and honor the statues and relics of the saints. But will that humiliation of ours be acceptable if we come to them as enemies of God, in the state of sin? Joram, the king of Israel, was the first of the three to address the Prophet, and what answer did he get? "And Eliseus said to the king of Israel: What have I to do with thee? go to the prophets of thy father and thy mother," whom you have hitherto thought so much of: "As the Lord of hosts liveth, in whose sight I stand, if I did not reverence the face of Josaphat, king of Juda, I would not have hearkened to thee, nor looked on thee."² Such is perhaps the answer that our holy patrons give us, when we appeal to them without amending our lives; what have I to do with thee? Go to those from whom you are wont to ask advice; go to the coffers you have filled with the proceeds of injustice and usury; go to the object of your impure passion, whom you have thought of even in the church, before our very altars; go to those for whose sake you violate the law of God; let them help you if they can. Eliseus did obtain the water for the three kings; but it was at the request of the just Josaphat and not for the sake of the two others, although they humbled themselves before him. In the same way, if we are sometimes helped in our necessities by the intercession of the saints, we owe that to pious Christians, who have procured that benefit for us by their fervent prayers. It often happens, too, that God will not allow the saints to intercede for those who do not submit to Him with contrite and humbled hearts. When the people of Juda were in difficulties, He expressly forbade the Prophet Jeremias to pray for them: "Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their prayers; and if they offer holocausts and victims, I will not receive them; for I will consume them by the sword,

¹ Descenditque ad eum rex Israel, et Josaphat, rex Juda, et rex Edom.—IV. Kings iii. 12.

² Dixit autem Eliseus ad regem Israel: quid mihi et tibi est? vade ad prophetas patris tui et matris tue. Vivit Dominus exercituum, in cujus conspectu sto, quod si non vultum Josaphat, regis Judæ, erubescerem, non attendissem quidem te, nec respexissem.—Ibid. 13, 14.

and by famine, and by the pestilence.”¹ Nay, sometimes the saints actually beg of God to punish us until we repent of our sins. In the reign of Achab, king of Israel, the people suffered from a severe drought, for not a drop of rain had fallen during three years and a half.² Imagine the state of the people and of the country under those circumstances. In those days the Prophet Elias was on earth, and he was looked on as the only one who could wrest the rod of chastisement out of the hand of God. The king sought him everywhere, even outside the kingdom, and the search was so accurate that Abdias, the governor whom the king had entrusted with it, was able to affirm on oath that there was not any country in which he had not been to look for the Prophet: “As the Lord thy God liveth,” said he to Elias, “there is no nation or kingdom whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee.”³ And yet Elias was the very one who, to compel the people to do penance for their sins, had prayed to God for that long and grievous drought; nor did he himself escape suffering, as well as the others, from that calamity, as we read in the Epistle of St. James: “Elias was a man passible like unto us, and with prayer he prayed that it might not rain upon the earth, and it rained not for three years and six months.”⁴ At last Elias prayed for rain, and obtained it: “And he prayed again: and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.”⁵ But when did he do so? When the false prophets of Baal had been duly punished, and the people had repented: “Take the prophets of Baal,” said the zealous man of God, “and let not one of them escape. And when they had taken them, Elias brought them down to the torrent Cison, and killed them there.”⁶ The people meanwhile had prostrated themselves on the ground, filled with sorrow for their sins: “And when all the people saw this, they fell on their faces and they said: The Lord He is God; the Lord He is God.”⁷ Then Elias went to

¹ Noli orare pro populo isto in bonum. Cum jejunaverint, non exaudiam preces eorum, et si obtulerint holocausta et victimas, non suscipiam ea, quoniam gladio, et fame, et peste consumam eos.—Jerem. xiv. 11, 12.

² Non pluit annos tres et menses sex.—James v. 17.

³ Vivit Dominus Deus tuus, quia non est gens aut regnum, quo non miserit Dominus meus, te requirens.—III. Kings xviii. 10.

⁴ Elias homo erat similis nobis passibilis: et oratione oravit, ut non plueret super terram, et non pluit annos tres et menses sex.—James v. 17.

⁵ Et rursum oravit, et cœlum dedit pluviam, et terra dedit fructum suum.—Ibid. 18.

⁶ Apprehendite prophetas Baal, et ne unus quidem effugiat ex eis. Quos cum apprehendissent, duxit eos Elias ad torrentem Cison, et interfecit eos ibi.—III. Kings xviii. 40.

⁷ Quod cum vidisset omnis populus, cecidit in faciem suam et ait: Domine ipse est Deus, Dominus ipse est Deus.—Ibid. 39.

Mt. Carmel and prayed for rain: "And there fell a great rain."¹ My dear brethren, God is now threatening us with misfortunes and calamities; we run to the churches to implore the help of our holy patrons; but how can we rely on them if we continue obstinately in our sins; for we have just reason to fear that the saints themselves will pray to God to afflict us, that we may be induced to amend. Therefore let us first get our sins out of the way, and have recourse to true penance; then we can have an assured confidence that the saints will help us by their mighty intercession.

And we
should re-
pent at
once.

Nor should we delay about this, nor wait till we feel the rod on our shoulders. That was the folly of which Pharaoh was guilty; he saw the frogs and vermin that filled the country; he saw the rivers and springs running blood, so that his subjects were forced to dig for water to cook and to quench their thirst; he knew well that, if he obeyed the command of God, Moses and Aaron would appease the divine anger by their prayers, and free the land from the plagues that were harassing it; yet he foolishly persisted in his obstinacy, and although he felt the stripes, he refused to submit. Driven at last to desperation, he had recourse to the two powerful intercessors and promised to obey the command of God. "But Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said to them: Pray ye to the Lord to take away the frogs from me and from the people: and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord."² "Set me a time," said Moses to him, "when I shall pray for thee. And he answered: to-morrow."³ One might think that Pharaoh looked on the plagues as blessings, since he did not ask to be freed from them at once. Foolish man! should you not rather have said: pray for me at once to the Lord, that He may free me from this plague, and I will immediately obey Him, and let His people go? Christians, while we wonder at the folly of this king, do we not condemn our own? For do we not act as he did, when we feel the pressure of misfortune? God wishes us to turn to Him, to amend our wicked ways, and to obey His law in all things; and we have recourse to the saints and beg and implore of them to help us, promising at the same time to do penance. But when is the penance to be done? When are we to amend our lives? To-morrow, at some future time. And thus we defer repentance until the punishment has

¹ Et facta est pluvia grandis.—III. Kings xviii. 45.

² Vocavit autem Pharaoh Moysen et Aaron, et dixit eis: orate Dominum ut auferat ranas a me, et a populo meo; et dimittam populum, ut sacrificet Domino.—Exod. viii. 8.

³ Constitue mihi, quando deprecari pro te. Qui respondit, cras.—Ibid. 9, 10.

actually overtaken us. No, not to-morrow, nor at some future time, but at once, without delay, we must do penance, if we are in earnest about averting the punishment.

And such is now our intention, O just and merciful God! “Behold, Thou art angry, and we have sinned.”¹ We have deserved the rod, that we cannot deny; but restrain Thy hand. “Be not very angry, O Lord, and remember no longer our iniquity; behold, see, we are all Thy people.”² We are now ready to detest our sins. We cast ourselves with contrite hearts at Thy feet, firmly purposing to amend our ways. Cast Thine eyes on Thy servant Sebastian, through whose merits and intercession we implore Thy mercy, and for his sake turn away from us the danger that threatens us, a danger that, we have every reason to dread, will be much worse after a time, but which in any case we must acknowledge we have richly deserved. Save and protect us, who fly for refuge to Thee and Thy saints; and we shall be able to fulfil what Christ said to His disciples: “When you shall hear of wars and seditions, be not terrified;”³ if nations and kingdoms war against each other; if famine and pestilence menace the world; if signs and portents are seen in the heaven; be not terrified. No, O God, we shall not be terrified, if Thou art with us! As long as we are under the protection of our powerful patron, we shall have nothing to fear, even if half the world were to take up arms against us; for we believe that to be true which Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, when he was about to attack the enemy: “It is easy for the Lord to save either by many or by few.”⁴ O holy St. Sebastian, powerful intercessor, and, as we believe with child-like confidence, special patron of this city and country! to thee we present our humble petition in our trouble and necessity; cease not to pray for those who, as long as they live, will, as they now unanimously promise, work zealously and constantly for God’s honor and thine. Amen.

For several Panegyrics on St. Sebastian, see the following Sixth Part.

¹ Ecce tu iratus es, et peccavimus.—Isa. lxiv. 5.

² Ne irascaris, Domine, satis, et ne ultra memineris iniquitatis nostræ; ecce respice, populus tuus omnes nos.—Ibid. 9.

³ Cum autem audieritis proelia et seditiones, nolite terreri.—Luke xxi. 9.

⁴ Non est Domino difficile salvare, vel in multis, vel in paucis.—I. Kings xiv. 6.

Conclusion
and prayer
to avert
calamity.

SEVENTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE NEW AND THE OLD YEAR, FOR SINNERS AND THE JUST.

Subject.

1. To the living I wish the old year; 2. to the dead, a happy new year.—*Preached on the feast of the Circumcision.*

Text.

Postquam consummati sunt dies octo.—Luke ii. 21.

“And after eight days were accomplished.”

Introduction.

The year has again come to an end, and in it many times eight days have been accomplished. New weeks, new months, and new years are beginning. I am not sure, my dear brethren, that it would not be better for us to remain by the old days and years than to expect new ones. It is true that to-day I hear everywhere the joyful wish: “A happy New Year!” Such is the greeting uttered by all, young and old, rich and poor, as if the new year were to bring some great treasure with it. For my part, I would prefer changing that greeting altogether, and wishing you and myself the old year back again; for we know what we have had in the old year, but we cannot say what the new will bring. However, not to depart altogether from the old custom, and at the same time not to concede too much to it, I wish you to-day the old year, and the new as well; and not to exclude any one, I take both the living and the dead into account in my wish.

Plan of Discourse.

To the living I wish the old year ; first part. To the dead I wish a happy new year ; second part. In the third and longest part I shall address that wish to all, of whatever condition they may be. The division of my discourse however, must be made, not by me, but by the conscience of each one of you. But I do desire from my heart that every one of you could bring home that wish about the old year. At all events, I trust that this sermon will be for the good of our souls.

That, as it is the only subject I now aim at, I beg of Thee, O Jesus, who, after the eight days were accomplished, didst show

in the circumcision that Thou art a Saviour of the living and the dead! This I beg of Thee through the intercession of Thy dearest Mother Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

My first wish, then, concerns the living. But what do I mean by that? Could I speak perhaps to the stones and walls and pillars of the church, and not to the men and women here present? And yet there is none of you who does not feel that he is alive. I allude, my dear brethren, to the living of whom St. Paul writes: "So do you also reckon that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus Our Lord;"¹ for they who live in that way are the only ones that really merit the name of being alive, as St. Augustine remarks on this passage: "He who, by leading a good life, lives unto God, really lives."² In a word, I allude to those who have spent the past year zealously serving God, attending to the great affair of their souls, and in the state of grace, for that is the only true life of the soul. To them I wish the old year. And what better thing could I desire for them than the days, with all their circumstances, that they have spent with a pure conscience, as dear children and friends of God? O happy days, how well spent you were! Who will bring you back to us again? O time precious beyond gold, would that we could have you to live over again!

The old year was a happy one for the good and pious.

Other days and times are approaching; but who can say of what kind they will be? Who can assure us that they will be as good for our souls? Ah, we are warned by the Wise Man: "Boast not for to-morrow, for thou knowest not what the day to come may bring forth."³ And there is reason for the warning. You have lived holy and pious lives during the old year; do you know whether you will be holy and pious during the new? If I consider what man is in himself, how inclined to evil, how weak and miserable in the faculties of his soul, how inordinate in his appetites, how changeable in his will, how inconstant in his resolutions, how many difficulties he has to contend with on the narrow path of virtue, how many dangerous occasions of sin, how much bad company he is exposed to on all sides; when I consider the lusts of the flesh, the deceits and false maxims of the world, the rage of the devil, which assail him in a thousand different ways, ah, how frightened I am! what anguish overcomes my heart on my own account as well as

But they may change and be perverted in the new year.

¹ Et vos existimate vos mortuos quidem esse peccato, viventes autem Deo, in Christo Jesu, Domino nostro.—Rom. vi. 11.

² Qui bene agendo vivit Deo, hic vere vivit.

³ Ne gloriaris in crastinum, ignorans quid superventura pariat dies. Prov. xxvii. 1.

on yours ! For, perhaps in the future time we may change our determinations, and in that occasion, that temptation, that house, that company, those circumstances, which are already known to the almighty God, and which the new year will bring with it, we may prove untrue to our God and to our good resolutions, go over to the devil, and commit mortal sin. Until the ship actually comes into port there is reason to fear that she may not accomplish her voyage safely; in a moment a storm may arise which will send her to the bottom. Our whole life is a dangerous sea; until we have reached the haven of a happy eternity, we cannot say for certain that our souls will not suffer shipwreck; a moment is enough to change a pious and holy man into a wicked sinner.

Many, from being saints, became great sinners.

To say nothing of daily experience, which abundantly proves the truth of this, read the holy Scripture, and you will find examples enough of men who, after having lived for a long time in great sanctity, were shamefully perverted. David, a man after God's own heart, as the Lord Himself says of him, whom no difficulty nor the unceasing persecution he had to sustain at the hands of Saul could seduce from the path of virtue, who used to spend the day and the night in praising God, by one careless glance became changed into a wicked adulterer, an unjust murderer, and for a long time afterwards remained in his sins, utterly forgetful of God. Solomon, the wisest man the world ever saw, who had conversed with God, and by His inspiration had written the holiest books, and laid down maxims of the deepest wisdom relating to holiness of life, who had spent enormous sums of money in building the glorious temple of Jerusalem to the true God, this Solomon, (who could believe it if the Eternal Truth did not assure us of it?) this Solomon allowed himself to be so befooled by women, that he adored stocks and stones as gods, and left the world in doubt as to whether he ever repented or not before his death. Joas spent over forty years in innocence, but afterwards he became an idolater. And there are countless similar examples. O human weakness, how great Thou art! O inconstancy, how general! If the lofty cedars fall so easily, what have not the frail reeds to fear? And that is the warning that St. Paul gives even to the most pious: "Wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."¹ How many are now burning in the flames of hell, for whom it would have been much better if they had died during their

¹ Itaque qui se existimat stare, videat ne cadat.—I. Cor. x. 12.

youth, and whom a new year brought into sin and the power of the devil! How many are now rejoicing in heaven, who would have been lost forever, if they had had a new year! Of them the Wise Man says: "Living among sinners, he was translated: he was taken away, lest wickedness should alter his understanding."¹ Thus we often know not how foolishly we act when we desire a long life for ourselves or our friends, or when we deplore the premature death of an innocent child. True are the words of Thomas à Kempis, "if it is terrible to die, perhaps it will be still more dangerous to live long."²

There, O just and pious souls, you have the reason of my wish in your regard; and if I could make it efficacious, I would desire nothing else for you but that the old year, which you have spent in the state of grace, would continue for you to the end of your lives. But I cannot go beyond the mere wish, which will effect nothing; the old year is gone, and there is an end of it; not a moment of it will ever return. Therefore I must be satisfied with wishing heartily, and begging of you by all that is dear to you, that you continue to live as you have lived during the past year; keep up during the new year your faith, your confidence in God, your devotion and piety, your justice, your zeal in the divine service, your love of God and of your neighbor, your modesty and humility, your devotion and love for the Mother of God and your holy guardian angels: in a word, stick to the old habits you have formed of Christian virtue and good works. Do not allow yourselves to be turned away from them by any new year, or new hour, or moment in it, by no new temptation, or occasion, or difficulty, or friendship, or company, or money, or wealth, or joy, or sorrow, or man, or devil, or any creature; let no one or nothing ever lead you into mortal sin. For what will it profit you to have lived as servants of God during the old year, if you become slaves of the devil during the new? What will it profit you to have lived holily during the old year, if you lead vicious lives during the new? What will it profit you to have gained heaven during the old year, if you forfeit it in the new, and perhaps die impenitent and go to hell? "Woe to them that have lost patience," is the threat that God utters by the wise Ecclesiasticus, "and that have forsaken the right ways, and have

Therefore it is to be wished that they continue to live in the old year.

¹ Vivens inter peccatores translatus est; raptus est, ne malitia mutaret intellectum ejus.—Wisd. iv. 10, 11.

² Si formidolosum est mori, forsitan periculosius erit diutius vivere.—Thom. Kemp. l. i. c. 23.

gone aside into crooked ways.¹ It is neither a good beginning, nor a good continuing, but a good ending that ensures our salvation: "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved,"² says Our Lord.

**Exhortation
to persevere
in virtue.**

Therefore you will remain steadfast, will you not? "Stand fast," I implore of you, in the words of St. Paul, "and be not held again under the yoke of bondage."³ You will have the same God in the new year as you had in the old, and the sole end of our being is to love and praise Him. Your souls will be just as precious and immortal in the new year, as in the old, and our only business should be to secure their eternal happiness; stand fast, then, and see that they suffer no harm. The fire of hell is there, too, and if we fall into it during the new year, we shall be unhappy forever; stand fast, then. We have still the same heaven to gain; stand fast. Our lives are just as uncertain as ever, we know nothing more about the hour of death, and the judgments of God are as strict as ever they were; be steadfast, then; let us be always on our guard, so that we may be ready to meet the Lord when He comes. To this end, renew every morning your good resolutions, examine your consciences every evening, let all your sighs and desires in prayer, all your care and anxiety in unavoidable occasions and dangers of sin tend to preserving your fidelity to God, so that you may always be resolved not to allow anything to turn you away from His service. Stand fast, then, my dear brethren! Almighty God of infinite goodness, grant by Thy grace that this wish of mine may be fulfilled!

Second Part.

**Sinners are
not really
alive.**

A happy new year to you who are dead! I do not mean the damned in hell; for no wish can help them. Nor the blessed in heaven, for they are not in need of wishes. Nor the souls in purgatory, for they do not desire to spend another year in the midst of torments. To you, O sinners! I am speaking, for, although you seem to be alive, yet in reality you are dead. All the days and hours you have spent in the state of sin during the past year are not to be reckoned as days and hours of life; all the works, even those that in themselves are most holy, performed in that state, are lifeless and without merit. "I know thy

¹ Vae his qui perdidit sustinentiam, et qui dereliquerunt vias rectas, et diverterunt in vias pravas.—Eccius. ii. 16.

² Qui autem perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit.—Matt. x. 22. ...

³ State, et nolite iterum jugo servitutis contineri.—Gal. v. 1.

works," might be said of you, as God told St. John to announce to the angel of the church of Sardis; "that thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead. For I find not thy works full before my God." O man, who have been hitherto in the state of sin! you have the name of being alive, and you are dead. You go about among the living; you eat, drink, laugh, and amuse yourself with them; you see, hear, and feel as they do; but you have merely the name of being alive; in reality you are dead; your body, as St. Ambrose says, is nothing but a foul grave, in which your miserable, wretched soul, that is an object of horror in the sight of God, is buried. ²

This is a truth that often helps the holy Fathers to reconcile passages of the Scriptures that seem to contradict each other. In the Book of Genesis we read that "Abram was seventy-five years old when he went forth from Haran."³ But how could that be true, for we read in another place that he was a hundred and thirty-five years old at that time? St. Jerome, who at first found an insuperable difficulty in this text, answers as follows: the years that Abraham spent amongst idolaters in Chaldea are not reckoned; but the years of his life are counted from the time when he first came to the knowledge of the true God, and abandoned idolatry. In the Book of Exodus, when God had determined to free His people from slavery, He said to Moses: "This month shall be to you the beginning of months."⁴ But had they had no months before, nor the beginning of a new year? Were they not over two hundred years in Egypt? True, says St. Gaudentius, "but the years they spent in Egypt are not reckoned; but when they sighed to the Lord, then they heard the words, "this month shall be to you the beginning of months."⁵ In the First Book of Kings we read that "Saul was a child of one year when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel."⁶ What? A child of one year? Was he not the tallest of all the people when they chose him as king? "And he stood in the midst of the people, and he was higher than any of the

Proved from
Scripture.

¹ Scio opera tua quia nomen habes quod vivas, et mortuus es. Non enim invenio opera tua plena coram Deo meo.—Apoc. iii. 1, 2.

² Carnem suam sicut tumulum circumferentes, cui miseram infoderunt animam suam.—S. Amb. l. ii. de Cain., c. 6.

³ Septuaginta quinque annorum erat Abram, cum egrederetur de Haran.—Gen. xii. 4.

⁴ Mensis iste vobis principium mensium.—Exod. xii. 2.

⁵ Non sunt imputati Israelitis illi dies quos consumpserunt in Ægypto; sed quando ingemuerunt ad Dominum, tunc audiverunt: mensis hic vobis initium mensium.

⁶ Filius unius anni erat Saul cum regnare coepisset; duobus autem annis regnavit super Israel.—I. Kings xiii. 1.

people from the shoulders and upward.”¹ It is equally certain that he reigned more than two years over Israel. The first words are interpreted by commentators to mean that, when he began his reign, he was like a child in innocence and purity of heart. St. Gregory explains the latter words by saying that he kept his innocence only two years after he had ascended the throne, and he adds: “The only time of our lives in which we can be said to live is that in which we live innocently and humbly.”² Now I can understand that strange text of the Prophet Isaias: “The child shall die a hundred years old.”³ Truly, that is a queer specimen of a child that is a hundred years old! But if you have spent a hundred years in the world, and passed the whole time at enmity with God, you are, as far as your moral life is concerned, like a newly-born child that has just commenced its first hour of life.

They have,
then, been
dead hith-
erto.

Such was the meaning of the epitaph that Adrian made for himself; he lived in the time of the emperor Adrian, and filled a very important office, which he laid down, that he might live in retirement and in the practice of virtue. These are the words he ordered to be put on his grave-stone: “Here lies Adrian, who could count many years of his age, but who lived not more than seven.” You see now, O sinner, that you cannot reckon those years that you have hitherto spent in sin; perhaps there were twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, or sixty of them; for out of your whole life the time alone that you passed in the grace of God is worth taking into account; all the other hours and days are dead and useless. If you have not yet begun to weep for your sins, you are not yet alive; if you are still the slave of the perverse world, or of the flesh and its inordinate appetites, you are not alive; if you are not yet freed from the slavery of Egypt and Babylon, if you have not yet left the miserable state of sin, you are not yet alive; if you are not resolved to return to God by true penance, to restore your ill-gotten gains, if you can, to their lawful owner, to shun the proximate occasion of sin, to give up forever that impure intimacy, you are not yet alive; you have the name of being alive, but you are dead; you seem to live, but your soul is in reality dead.

They must
begin to
live in the
new year.

Oh, then I wish you a happy new year! For you want it in order to begin to live, or else you will go from temporal to eter-

¹ Stetitque in medio populi, et altior fuit universo populo ab humero et sursum.—I. Kings x. 23.

² Illo solum tempore nos vixisse gaudeamus, quo innocenter et humiliter viximus.

³ Puer centum annorum morietur.—Isa. lxx. 20.

nal death. I wish you a happy new year; for, if you spend the coming year as miserably as you did the past, and continue so to the end, then, indeed, I should recall my words, and not wish you a single day, nor a single hour, since it would be far better for you to die now, and to go to hell, than to increase the number of your sins by living longer, and thus add to your eternal torments. May the good God save you and me from such a fate! A happy new year to you, then, that you may do penance, and that, too, without delay, for you may not see the end of the new year. Unhappy man, if the old year had been your last, if death had seized you and had hurried your body into the tomb, what would have become of you? Where would you be now? Where would you be for all eternity? Alas, amongst the demons in a hell that after thousands and millions of years will not come to an end! You have luckily escaped that fate up to this; rejoice, then, and thank God for His patience and mercy in giving you time to repent; for, during the past year, the same God has hurled into the abyss of hell countless souls who were in the same state as you. But do not run any further risk, I advise you; perhaps in this new year, on this first day of it, you will hear the words: "Time shall be no longer."¹

Have you ever read what became of the fig-tree, of which St. Luke writes in his Gospel? "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none."² What is the meaning of this? said he with displeasure to the dresser of the vineyard. "Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none."³ I am tired of seeking to no purpose. "Cut it down therefore; why cumbereth it the ground?"⁴ Into the fire with it! It is not worth the room it occupies! But lord, said the man, wait a little; have patience for another year. "Let it alone this year also, until I dig about it and dung it."⁵ Perhaps it will bear then; "if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."⁶ O sinner, how many years is it now that you are on this earth to no purpose? How many years has the good God been seeking fruits of penance and good works in you, and has

Otherwise
they run
the risk of
eternal
death.

¹ Tempus non erit amplius.—Apoc. x. 6.

² Arborem ficl habebat quidam plantatam in vinea sua, et venit quærens fructum in illa, et non invenit.—Luke xlii. 6.

³ Ecce anni tres sunt, ex quo venio quærens fructum in ficulnea hac; et non invenio.—Ibid. 7.

⁴ Succide ergo illam; ut quid etiam terram occupat?—Ibid.

⁵ Dimitte illam et hoc anno, usque dum fodiam circa illam, et mittam stercora.—Ibid. 8.

⁶ Sin autem, in futurum succides eam.—Ibid. 9.

not found any? Alas, exclaims St. Augustine, "after three years, what other fate is in store for you, but the axe and the fire?"¹ After three years, sayest thou, O great saint? Ah, and how will it then be with those who have spent ten, twenty, thirty years, or more in vice, without producing fruit? What other fate have they to expect, but an unhappy death, and the fire of hell? But, O good God, have patience yet a year! O Father of mercy, have mercy for a while longer! Jesus Christ, our meekest Saviour, grant a respite of another year to these sinners! Well, then, is the answer that God seems to give us: here is a year, which you commence to day. But if you allow this, too, to pass by without producing fruit; if you abuse My patience and long-suffering as you have hitherto done; if you will not give up sin, do penance, and amend your lives, what will you have to expect but that the axe will be laid to the root of the useless tree, and that it will be cast into hell?

Exhortation
to begin to
serve God
in the new
year.

Hear, O man! I do not pretend to be a prophet, nor to be able to tell you what will happen to you; but, for God's sake, do not trifle with the time now granted you; remember how much depends on it! If this new year is to be the last for you, and it will be the last for many thousands, (do you know for certain that you will not be amongst their number? Can you promise yourself the morrow?) if, I say, this is to be your last year, and you do not amend your life meanwhile, what will become of your poor soul this year? It will go where it would have gone in the old year, if you had been hurried off by death in your sins. And what better will you then be for having obtained another year from the divine mercy, which graciously consented to prolong your life, if you are lost forever in the new year? Therefore act on that heart-felt wish of mine, and delay no longer to fulfil it. Let this be for you a happy new year, in which you will put off the old man with his vices, and put on the new man, leading a virtuous life in the service and zealous love of God, to whom you owe all the years of your life, to whom you should devote them all for countless reasons, as St. Paul warns you: "To put off, according to your former conversation, the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who, according to God, is created in justice and holiness of truth."²

¹ Post triennium quid restat, nisi securis?—S. Aug. serm. lxxii.

² Deponere vos secundum pristinam conversationem veterem hominem, qui corrumpitur secundum desideria erroris; renovamini autem spiritu mentis vestræ, et induite novum hominem, qui secundum Deum creatus est in justitia, et sanctitate veritatis.—Eph. iv. 22-24.

Again I cry out to you, sinners, you who are dead, a happy new year! There, my dear brethren, you have my twofold wish for the new year. Each one of you will find the wish that will suit him; let him only examine himself in the duties and obligations of his state of life, and his own conscience will tell him whether he is to go on in the old way, or to commence a new mode of life. I will help you briefly to make this examen in the

Third Part.

I begin with the most excellent state of the priesthood and the clergy. But you, gentlemen, are not in need of any instruction from me; you understand, or at least ought to understand, what your most weighty obligations require of you; obligations that you do not satisfy by living merely as good Christians, unless you also are good priests and religious. The very name of priest tells us clearly what we have to do. "A priest," says a learned author, "is one who is devoted to sacred things, who dispenses sacred things, who teaches sacred things;"¹ he has to teach others and show them the right road to heaven. Have you fulfilled that obligation carefully during the old year? Then I congratulate you, if so, and recommend you to continue in the same line of conduct. But have you, perhaps, failed in your duty by omission, by unlawful conversation, by words or works that are unbecoming your state, or even by giving scandal? Oh, then I wish you a happy new year! and it must begin all the quicker, your efforts to amend should be all the more zealous, the more the splendor of the Catholic Church, the progress of a whole Christian community, depends on your lives and example. For what will the people be, if the priest has no virtue? What relish will others have for the things of eternity, if the salt of the earth loses its savor? Where will the feet go, if the eyes are blind, which should give them light and lead them? But a few words suffice for the learned.

Wish addressed to the clergy.

Temporal superiors, judges, counsellors, lawyers, and officials! Jethro long ago described what the duties imposed on you by God require of you: "Provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, in whom there is truth, and that hate avarice, and appoint of them rulers of thousands. . . . who may judge the people at all times."² Mark those words: they must be "able

To temporal superiors.

¹ *Sacerdos idem est, quod sacris datus, sacra dans, sacra docens.*

² *Provide autem de omni plebe viros potentes, et timentes Deum, in quibus sit veritas, et qui oderint avaritiam, et constitue ex eis tribunos, . . . qui judicent populum omni tempore.—Exod. xviii. 21, 22.*

men," that is, experienced and capable of doing the duties of their office. So should you be, gentlemen; but this is a matter that not every one considers as he ought. Remember, then, that it is not enough to take office if the duties of it are not properly fulfilled; remember that to your counsels and deliberations, to your hands and pens, are entrusted the common weal, the honor and property, nay, the lives of men; and if you are guilty of a grievous error in your office, through carelessness or incapacity, you will have to make restitution for it. You must be men that fear God; if the fear of the Lord controls your actions, no human respect, nor the fear of any man, no matter who he is, will find place in you, or keep you from doing what you owe to God and your country. "In whom there is truth," that is, justice. If you love justice, O how much good you can do! how much evil you can hinder! Justice is blind, it goes on straight ahead, and observes equality in all things. In its scales a poor man weighs as heavily as a rich man; a stranger, as a relation; a lowly workman, as a powerful statesman; a poor widow, as a great lord. Its drawn sword punishes public vices, scandalous customs and abuses contrary to God's honor and the common good, and banishes them from the state. "That hate avarice:" if that vice has once taken possession of the heart and mind, then good-bye to justice and the fear of God! for it blinds the eyes, stops the ears, ties the hands, and silences the tongue; it makes black white, and white black; unjust transactions are defended, just ones shelved, and many unhappy results follow, that some poor people will have to deplore for many years. Happy, gentlemen, are your past years, if you have been during them as Jethro says you should be! Continue on in your old fashion. But if the conscience of any of you pricks him on this head, there is a new year beginning to-day, in which you may make good the faults of the past, and so prepare for that account which even those who judge the world will one day have to render.

To married
people.

How was the old year with you, married people? Have conjugal fidelity, mutual love, and a good understanding been preserved among you inviolably? You must love one another, as St. Paul tells you: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for it,"¹ that is, you must love each other with a holy, chaste, trusting, kind, and constant love, which keeps away all suspicion of your

¹ Viri, diligite uxores vestras, sicut et Christus dilexit Ecclesiam, et seipsum tradidit pro ea.—Eph. v. 25.

mutual fidelity, makes you share in each other's joys and sorrows, bear with each other's faults, and help each other to lighten the burden of the cares of your state. Have you trained up your children and servants, according to your duty, for their last end, in the fear and love of God and for heaven, by instructing them in their duties as Christians, by keeping a watchful eye on them, by correcting their faults in a parental manner, but above all by giving them good example? I congratulate you a thousand times if such is the case! The past year must have been filled with blessings and graces for you, both spiritual and temporal. Continue in the old way till death. But, alas, if your children are trained according to the ways of the world, or are neglected altogether; if your mutual love has been changed into jealousy, misunderstanding, hatred, and quarrelling, or, what is still worse, if you have been wanting in conjugal fidelity, a sin to which the wife often gives occasion by her peevish and fault-finding disposition, by her obstinacy, or by too great freedom with the opposite sex, but still more frequently the husband by the habit of drunkenness, which causes him to neglect his family, while his poor wife and children have to bear his excesses with patience, or, as St. John Chrysostom says, have to look at him as they would at a fierce tyrant, or a wild beast, trembling in every limb at his approach, so that the wife is not his companion, but rather his bond-slave and servant; oh, unhappy the married life of such people! the old year has been utterly useless for them! a happy new year to you, then, married people! You must change at once, if you do not wish to drag each other as well as your children into eternal ruin.

Christian young women, what shall I wish you? I need not reflect long; for, while you are unmarried, your state is the only one that comes completely to an end when a grievous sin is committed against it. If you have hitherto preserved the treasure of your holy purity, then, according to what all the Fathers say, you are humble, modest, restrained in your eyes, your movements, your dress, and all your inward and outward actions; your only care, then, may be how to please that God who has enabled you by the help of His grace to preserve untarnished such a precious jewel. "The virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit."¹ Go on, then, in the old way, until God calls you to another state, for He alone is the Lord over our souls and bodies. Meanwhile be

To young
unmarried
women.

¹ Virgo cogitat quæ Domini sunt, ut sit sancta corpore et spiritu.—I. Cor. vii. 34.

careful during the new year to preserve by the utmost modesty of demeanor this precious treasure, and to avoid all that might expose it to the danger of being lost. You should look after it with a kind of holy pride; for if you keep modestly at home, and avoid dangerous company and gatherings and promenades with those of the opposite sex; if you refuse to do as the children of the world do (I call them children of the world, for there is no sign of maidenly modesty about them), you will not escape ridicule; you will be called simple-minded fools, who do not know the ways of the world. But you must take no notice of that, and keep all the more firmly to your good resolutions; you must look on yourselves as far too respectable to act as those others do. They alone know how to live well who love God above all things with their whole hearts.

To widows. The widows will be helped in their examen by St. Francis de Sales; there are, he says, two ornaments that widows should wear in their daily lives, namely, humility and patience; two that they should wear on the tongue, decency and kindliness;¹ two in 'heir eyes, modesty and reserve;² and in their heart they should have nothing but the love of Jesus Christ crucified.³ If those beautiful virtues have adorned your souls and bodies during the past year, then continue steadfastly in the old way, certain that your very state, as Tertullian says, is a recommendation to the divine mercy, and that God will take you under His special protection. "The Father of all," such are the words of Tertullian, "has undertaken to protect the names of widow and orphan, as having special claims on His mercy."⁴ If sometimes you have to suffer persecution which you are not able to repel, then abandon yourselves and those belonging to you to your almighty and merciful Father, and have full and perfect confidence that He will look after you.

**To young
unmarried
men.**

Young unmarried men! how did you get on during the past year? You are now in a state and at a time of life in which God is making special efforts to gain your hearts and affections; for He always tries to keep the first fruits for Himself; but at the same time you are in a state and an age which is, generally speaking, the most dangerous of all, as far as your innocence is concerned. Have you always kept sight of God and your souls.

¹ Honestas et verborum benignitas.

² Modestas et pudicitia.

³ Unicus cordis illius amor Jesus Christus crucifixus.

⁴ Duo ista nomina, viduæ et pupilli, divinæ misericordiæ exposita suscepit tueri Pater omnium.

carefully avoided dangerous companions and occasions of sin, and shunned idleness as the devil's favorite pillow and the home of all sins and temptations? Have you frequented the sacraments, been devout to the Mother of God and to your holy guardian angels? Have you had a desire to hear the word of God in sermons (a necessary means of preserving your innocence)? If so, then rejoice and keep on in the old way! But if not, if the devil or the flesh has induced you to consent to a mortal sin, I am sorry for you! You must at once begin a new life with the new year, and resume your former innocent conversation. Take to heart those words of the Holy Ghost in the Book of Proverbs: "A young man, according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it."¹

Children, how have you behaved during the old year to your parents? Servants, what has been your conduct to your masters and mistresses? Have you followed the rules I laid down for you in detail on a former occasion, that is, have you shown obedience, reverence, fidelity, and love to those to whom you owe your lives after God, or whom God Himself has placed over you? If so, go on, and keep to the old way; if not, if you have been wanting in this duty, then I wish you a happy new year, in which you may begin at once to correct such an abominable fault. For he who does not honor his parents or masters cannot expect grace or blessing from God.

To children
and ser-
vants.

Finally, ye poor and oppressed souls, who are overwhelmed with crosses and trials! how did things go with you during the old year? Alas, badly enough, you answer, and if the new year is no better, then may God help us! Of course, He will help you. But why do you say that things went so badly with you? Have you had to suffer one trouble after another? Were you visited by adversity, bodily pain, misfortunes, hunger and thirst, so that your hot tears were mingled with your bread? That is hard indeed. But how did you bear those adversities? Did you endure them with Christian patience, with a good intention for God's sake, in union with the will of God and in the state of sanctifying grace? If so, the old year was not such a bad one, after all; it was, in fact, a very good one. Exult, then, and rejoice in the Lord! All the troubles you have had to bear are over now, are they not? But what a glorious crown you have gained in heaven by the means of them, a crown that will last forever! Go on, then, in the old way; the new year and

To the poor
and op-
pressed.

¹ *Adolescens juxta viam suam, etiam cum senuerit, non recedet ab ea.*—Prov. xxii. 6.

and the other years of your lives will pass perhaps like the last, and at the end will leave nothing but consolation and joy of soul for you. But if you have not resigned yourselves to the will of God; if you have borne your daily trials without a good intention, or, what is worse, with murmuring and discontent, and given way to cursing or despair, then, indeed, the past year was a bad one for you, and I pity you with all my heart! And, in God's name, what better are you now for all you have suffered? You have actually made your crosses heavier, because you bore them without the hope of a reward and in a spirit of opposition to the will of God. Will the new year be like the old one in that respect? Let us hope not; for you will not get rid of your troubles in that way. I do not wish you a new year of adversity; yet, if the new year should bring its load of trouble for you, begin at least to bear it in a different manner, and to make a virtue of necessity, and thus in one hour you gain more than all the treasures of the earth put together. Seek consolation from Him who is the only true Consoler, Jesus Christ, who for your sake and mine died on the cross; who, as the Apostle says, became poor for your sake, although He is the richest of all; who was sorrowful even to death, although He is the joy of the angels; who was a man of sorrow, although He is the almighty God. Continue, then, or begin, as the case may be, to carry your cross; and you will have a happy new year, although it may be filled with all sorts of trials.

Prayer to
God to
grant by
His grace
the wishes
expressed
for all.

By way of conclusion I turn to Thee, O great and almighty God, and in the name of all present I thank Thee from the bottom of my heart for all the benefits Thou hast lavished on us with fatherly love during the old year; and firstly for the great grace by which Thou hast preserved the just from sin, and hast kept the spiritual life of their souls; and in the second place for the wonderful patience with which Thou hast borne with me and all other poor sinners, and hast given us time to repent and amend our lives. I have still one request to make of Thee, in the words of Thy servant David, when he prayed for his people: "O Lord God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Israel our fathers, keep forever this will of their hearts, and let this mind remain always for the worship of Thee;"¹ preserve in the pious the mind with which they have hitherto served Thee;

¹ Domine Deus Abraham, et Isaac, et Israel patrum nostrorum, custodi in æternum hanc voluntatem cordis eorum, et semper in venerationem tui mens ista permaneat.—I. Paralip. xxix. 18.

keep them from all dangers and occasions of sin, or strengthen them therein by Thy grace, so that they may never be separated from Thy love! Touch with the same grace the hearts of all sinners, that they may come to know the danger in which they are, and return to Thy holy service by speedy penance. Come, O sinners, come with me! let us no longer delay, but, according to the advice of St. Chrysologus, make the unalterable resolution "to give to God the remnants of the life we have devoted entirely to the world; we have given the year to the body, let us give a few days to the soul."¹ How ashamed I am when I think of it, O my God! I must acknowledge with confusion that I have given the best years of my life to the flesh and the devil; so many months, days, hours, and countless moments I have squandered away in useless cares and occupations, and even in sin. Oh, if I had used all that time to serve Thee, what an exceeding great reward I should now have laid up in heaven! And now I present to Thee the remnant of my life, although Thou shouldst have had the whole of it. Yet I know that I do not come too late for Thy infinite goodness; "receive, then, O Lord," I exclaim in the words of St. Bernard, "the years that remain to me, and do not despise a contrite and humbled heart, for those I have lost by living in sin."² I will begin with this new year to lead a new life; new with regard to my eyes, which I will turn away from all sinful and dangerous objects; new with regard to my ears, which I will close against all impure and slanderous talk; new with regard to my tongue, which I will keep better in check, that it may not break out into useless or slanderous conversation, or into that abominable cursing and swearing; new with regard to my hands, which will nevermore be stretched out to do an act of injustice or impurity; new with regard to my feet, which will nevermore bring me into that house, that company in which, alas, I have so often sinned; new with regard to my whole body, which I shall mortify with instruments of penance instead of tricking it out in an indecent and extravagant manner; new with regard to my thoughts and desires, which shall be withdrawn from earthly things in order to be fixed on heavenly; new with regard to my whole heart, which I now wish to devote, although somewhat late, to loving Thee above all things with all the more zeal. Do Thou, O God

¹ Vivamus Deo paululum, qui sæculo viximus totum; dedimus corpori annum, demus animæ paucos dies.

² Suscipe igitur, Domine, obsecro, residuum annorum meorum; pro his vero quos vivendo perdidit qui perdidit vixi, cor contritum et humillatum non despicies.

of goodness, grant me Thy powerful grace to this end, while I give in Thy name to all here present Thy holy blessing to the same end: May the Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost bless you. Amen.

For several Sermons on the New Year, see the preceding First and the following Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Parts.

END OF THE SIXTH VOLUME.

To the greater honor and glory of God, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of heaven, and of our holy guardian angels, and to the salvation of souls.

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